

American Splendor

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FADE IN:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A BEDROOM MIRROR.

The room is dark. A perfectly square mirror hangs crooked on a wall.

Suddenly, out of the darkness, the reflection of a man's face comes into focus. He stares straight ahead, perhaps studying his own unrecognizable reflection. It's quite clear this is a portrait of sickness; the man's pallor is gray, his eyes are confused. There is something most definitely wrong.

Tentatively, the figure steps away from the mirror, leaving the frame empty and dark.

ANGLE ON BED

Like a ghost, the naked man (Harvey) stands over his bed staring down at his sleeping wife (Joyce). In the eerie light, he's almost translucent.

HARVEY
(faintly)
Joyce ... Joyce?

Joyce springs up, alarmed.

JOYCE
What's wrong, Harvey? What are you
doing up?

Harvey just stands there for a moment saying nothing.

JOYCE (cont'd)
What is it?

HARVEY
(delirious, out of breath)
Tell me the truth. Am I some guy
who writes about himself in a comic
book? Or am I just --am I just a
character in that book?

Joyce rubs her eyes.

JOYCE
Harvey ...

HARVEY

If I die, will 'dat character keep
goin'? Or will he just fade away

...

Joyce just stares at him, unsure how to answer. Suddenly
Harvey collapses.

Joyce leaps from the bed, nervous, hysterical. She gets down
on the floor and shakes him.

JOYCE

Omigod, Harvey! Harvey, wake up!

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S FACE

His eyes remain closed, his expression far, far away.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. CLEVELAND ROW HOUSE - FALL - 1956 - DAY

FADE UP ON:

A surreal kaleidoscope of black, white and red. Similar to
the mirror scene above, the colors slowly come into focus,
revealing the chiseled features of a familiar face. But this
time we see that it is not a real face, but rather a plastic
mask of the D.C. Comic hero -- SUPERMAN.

INTERTITLE: CLEVELAND OHIO, 1956

CLOSE ON SUPERMAN MASK

It glows eerily in the light of a porch lamp. A child's
pupils glare through the eye holes ...

The camera pans from SUPERMAN to the masked face of another
caped-crusader: BATMAN. Batman turns toward his loyal side-
kick ROBIN, who clutches a plastic, trick-or-treat pumpkin.
Next, we find THE GREEN LANTERN as he reaches up to ring the
doorbell. The camera finally rests on the last boy: an
unkempt KID wearing no costume at all.

Looking irritated and removed from the rest of the group, the
KID shoves his hands in the pockets of his shearling coat.
He spits and rolls his eyes as a lady answers the door.

The brick home is as working class as it gets. The lady at
the door is a 1950's HOUSEWIFE.

BOYS
 (in unison)
 Trick or treat!!

HOUSEWIFE
 Well, look at this! All the super-
 heroes on the porch! Ain't that
 cute.

The Lady drops a candy apple in each boy's container.

HOUSEWIFE (cont'd)
 (still yelling)
 We got Superman here, Batman, his
 sidekick ROBIN, ohh, The Green
 Lantern even ...

She finally stops at the costumeless KID. He halfheartedly
 holds up a ratty, stained pillowcase.

HOUSEWIFE (cont'd)
 And what about you young man?

KID
 What about what?

The other boys giggle. The kid flashes them a "kick yer ass"
 look.

HOUSEWIFE
 Who are you supposed to be?

The kid shrugs.

KID
 I'm Harvey Pekar (pronounced "Pee
 Car").

HOUSEWIFE
 Harvey Pekar? That doesn't sound
 like a super hero to me...

BOYS
 (mumbling)
 Pecker, Pecker ...

KID
 I ain't no super hero, lady. I'm
 just a kid from the neighborhood,
 alright?

The Housewife stares at him, confused.

KID (cont'd)
Ahh, forget this...

Frustrated, the kid throws his pillowcase down. He trudges off as the others watch in confusion.

KID (cont'd)
Why is everybody so stoopid?

BEGIN NERVOUS JAZZ SCORE

WE FOLLOW the schlumpy kid (aka HARVEY PEKAR) as he sulks down the street...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND ROW HOUSE - FALL - 1975 - DUSK

INTERTITLE: CLEVELAND OHIO, 1975

A grown-up version of HARVEY PEKAR (now mid-thirties) stomps along the same Cleveland street. Unfortunately, 20 years have made this rust belt neighborhood a bit rustier. The "GROWN UP HARVEY" dons the same shearling coat, sports the same disheveled hair, and wears the same curmudgeonly expression.

CREDIT SEQUENCE - ANIMATED SEQUENCE

INTERCUT HARVEY WALKING WITH COMIC BOOK PANELS OF THE CARTOON HARVEY IN ACTION. This is not your typical super-hero stuff. Instead it features our man engaging in such daredevil feats as:

INT. CITY BUS - FALL 1975 - DAY

--Riding the city bus.

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - DAY

--Working as a file clerk at the Veteran's Hospital.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN - DAY

--Trying to wash dishes.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

--Waiting on line at the supermarket.

EXT. GARAGE SALE - DAY

--Buying used records from a garage sale table.

INT. GREASY SPOON DINER - DAY

--Eating junk food at a greasy spoon.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Harvey fixes a rip in his coat with Elmer's Glue.

(Note: Each "Cartoon Harvey" looks similar but unique... A variation on a theme. This is because his cartoons are drawn by different comic artists.)

Intermittently, bold cartoon credits flash across the screen:

FROM OFF THE STREETS OF CLEVELAND COMES ...

Followed by the explosive title:

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

The high-energy music and upbeat titles -- in direct contrast to the sulking image of Harvey -- continue through the remainder of the credits.

EXT. CLEVELAND STREET OVERLOOKING FACTORIES - DAY

We're now on HARVEY'S back as he continues his forlorn journey. We move forward, past him, to peer over the hill at the factories below.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Okay. We're throwing a lot at ya here, so lemme step in an' help ya catch up. This is the story about comic books, an' a guy who made a whole life outta them. You could even say comics saved his life. This guy here, he's our man, Harvey Pekar -- all grown up and goin' nowhere.

REAL HARVEY(cont'd)

Although he's a pretty scholarly cat, he never got much of a formal education. For the most part, he's lived in shit neighborhoods, held shit jobs, and is now knee deep into a second disastrous marriage. So if yer lookin' for romance or escapism or some fantasy figure to save the day, guess what? Ya got the wrong movie.

SUDDENLY EVERYTHING--THE MUSIC, THE CREDITS, THE IMAGES--
COMES TO A HALT.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

The REAL HARVEY PEKAR (not the actor who trudged through the credits) sits behind a microphone, supplying the "voice over" above. He clutches a movie script in his hand.

The frame is spare, with a few well-chosen items to indicate that he's in a recording session.

Although he is significantly older than the man who portrays him, the "Real Harvey" is every bit as much of a sad sack... maybe even more.

He is large and slightly threatening with knitted brows and wild eyes. Yet there is something kind and vulnerable about him -- a teddy bear who could kick your ass.

Off Camera, WE HEAR the voices of the male and female directors (us -- BOB and SHARI) coaching the "Real Harvey" through his voice over. Harvey's irritable and contrary, saying that the whole Halloween incident never even happened. "But I don't care man. I'm just doing this for the dough." We learn that Harvey is a reluctant participant in a film being made about his life.

SUDDENLY, his third wife JOYCE BRABNER -- an intelligent control freak obsessed with all things negative -- joins in the conversation. Pushing back her huge glasses, she reprimands Harvey like he is an infant: "Harvey you are talking too loud, Harvey you are being difficult." Harvey just rolls his eyes. Joyce gets offended. It is clear they have had this argument a million times. As Joyce storms off...

Harvey explains that his wife is trying to take over the movie. He laments that she is his third wife, and he has no luck with women. "Man, chicks just don't dig me." That's why he marries anyone who will have him. "And I marry them fast before they get to know the real me..."

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

INTERTITLE: 1975

HARVEY sits on a table in his T-shirt and underwear. A DOCTOR unwraps a tongue depressor.

Harvey's voice is hoarse, raspy and barely audible. It sounds like it hurts for him to talk. Yet, he can't stop ranting.

HARVEY

Doc, you gotta help me. My old lady's dumping me 'cause I can't talk. She says I'm a social embarrassment. Now that she's got her PhD, she's some hot shit academic star an' I'm nuthin' but a file clerk with nothin' ta say an' no voice ta say it. But me bein' a file clerk was fine when I wrote the damn check for her tuition--

DOCTOR #1

Harvey, stop talking please, and open wide.

He points the tongue depressor at Harvey's mouth but he just keeps on going.

HARVEY

I just don't get it ... We were doin' okay for a while. Then we took that stupid belated honeymoon. I started losin' my voice on the plane. Can you believe that... On the plane, doc?

DOCTOR #1

Bad timing, I guess. Now please say "Ah," Mr. Pekar.

HARVEY

"Ahhh."

(without missing a beat)

"Ahhh" ruined the trip. I got crazy, started to worry my voice would never come back. I mean, my wife didn't know me so long before we got hitched. What if she totally forgets what I'm like? Man, it's torture--

DOCTOR #1

Shhh

The Doctor shines a penlight into Harvey's mouth and looks around.

DOCTOR #1 (cont'd)

Uh-huh.

He raises an eyebrow. Harvey catches this. Hypochondria overtakes him.

HARVEY

(the penlight in his mouth)

What? Is it bad, doc?

The Doctor removes the penlight.

DOCTOR #1

It's not good.

Harvey jumps off the table.

HARVEY

It's cancer? First I got marital problems and now yer tellin' me I got throat cancer? Omigod ...

DOCTOR #1

Harvey, calm down. It's not cancer. You have a nodule on your vocal chords. Probably from screaming and yelling too much. And if you don't stop talking and give it a rest, you're gonna lose your voice completely.

Relieved, Harvey calms down. He nods, agreeing to be good.

HARVEY
 Whew ... Okay, okay. But fer how
 long?

DOCTOR #1
 A few months.

HARVEY
 (loudly)
 Months!!

Suddenly Harvey's voice cracks under his effort to raise it.
 He sheepishly grabs his throat.

DOCTOR #1
 See? More of that and you'll do
 permanent damage. Now go home,
 keep your mouth shut, and hopefully
 we won't have to operate.

Operate? Harvey gets nervous again. The Doctor throws him
 his clothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND STREET - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

A silent sequence. A dejected HARVEY walks home alone along
 an empty lot. Day-old dirty snow clings to the ground.

He wanders through a down-in-the-heels neighborhood, passing
 run-down stores and ramshackle apartments.

EXT. BUS STOP - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

Harvey approaches TOBY -- a dumpy 20-something going on 60-
 something in ridiculous, mismatched polyester clothing. He
 is odd, awkward and talks with a monotone, robotic voice. In
 short, he is a super dork.

TOBY
 Hi Harvey. You weren't in work
 today. Are you okay, Harvey?

Harvey barely looks up. He nods his head "yes" and keeps
 walking.

TOBY (cont'd)
 (yelling after him)
 I'm heading downtown to the White
 Castle. Wanna come, Harvey?

Harvey leaves Toby behind and turns the corner.

EXT. DELI - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

Two WOMEN argue loudly over a payphone.

SPANISH WOMAN #1 (IN SPANISH)
*I already told you, I'm waiting for
a call!*

SPANISH WOMAN #2
*Oh yeah? Since when is this your
private office?!*

SPANISH WOMAN #1
Since you can kiss my ass.

Harvey stops in his tracks and stares at them, jealous of their ability to speak.

CLOSE UP: SPANISH WOMAN #1's MOUTH

HARVEY
(to himself)
Look at 'em yakkin'. How do they
do it?

Out of the corner of her eye, WOMAN #2 notices Harvey eavesdropping.

WOMAN #2
(yelling at Harvey)
Ay, what are you looking at?
Maricone!

Startled, Harvey moves on.

EXT. ACROSS FROM A PARK - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

He passes a group of KIDS playing in the snow. They scream, yell and laugh with abandon.

HARVEY
(shaking his head)
They all make it seem so easy.

Then, BAM! Harvey is awakened from his reverie by a snowball. The kids laugh loudly. He wipes away the snow and walks on.

A VOICE OVER interrupts the scene.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man walking home from the doctor's. He's got the weight of the world on him. And fer what, really? 'Cause his throat's a little screwy? Man, people in India are starvin' to death every day. His problems are nothin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE OVER TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Totally dejected, HARVEY crosses over train tracks on his way home.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Still, he can't help feelin' paranoid, like some supernatural force is conspiring against him to rob him of his voice.

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

Harvey sulks up the steps of his brick low-rise apartment building. He passes an ELDERLY NEIGHBOR coming down the walk with her shopping cart. Harvey unlocks the door.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Maybe his old lady will go easy on him today, when she sees how upset he is.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - WINTER - 1975 - DAY

Harvey's second wife LANA -- a hippyish chic with long hair and a bad attitude -- pulls books off a shelf and selectively throws them onto the floor or packs them into a milk crate. An overstuffed suitcase sits beside her. She's obviously leaving him. HARVEY enters the room.

HARVEY

(whispering)

Ay ... What is this?

Harvey's voice breaks up.

LANA

Exactly what it looks like.

HARVEY

(loud)

Whattya mean!! You mean yer
dumpin' me?! Fer what?

(his voice really rips)

Ah, shit!

That last yell did it. Harvey grabs throat in pain, torn between his throat discomfort and trying to stop his wife from leaving.

LANA

Look, your plebeian lifestyle isn't
working for me anymore.
Cleveland's not working for me
anymore. I gotta get out of here
before I kill myself.

HARVEY

But--

She gathers her bags and heads for the door. Harvey trails her, trying to reason.

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

HARVEY (cont'd)

(mouthing, just a wheeze)

Please! Wait, honey ... Just
listen to what I got to say ...

She turns and stares at him. Harvey tries to say something. But now nothing at all comes out of his mouth. Only wheezes air.

He tries again. No sound at all.

Finally LANA gives up, turns back towards the door and leaves.

SLAM!!

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1975 - DAY

At his cubicle in the file room, Harvey fills a cart with files. He's physically at work, but mentally in a daze.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
 Here's our man--yeah alright,
 here's me --or the guy playin' me,
 anyway, though he don't look
 nothin' like me, but whatever. So
 it's a few months later an' I'm
 workin' my flunky, file-clerk gig
 at the V.A. Hospital. My voice
 still ain't back yet. Things seem
 like they can't get any worse...

A nurse pops her head in. Harvey hands her a file.

NURSE
 Thank you, Harvey dear.

He doesn't hear her, still stewing about LANA. He shoves the last files in the cart and pushes it away.

HARVEY
 (to himself)
 Plebeian ... where the hell did she
 get that shit?

CUT TO:

INT. FILE ROOM -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

We see rows and rows of endless files ...

Still in a daze, Harvey removes the files from the cart and puts them on the shelves.

MR. BOATS (O.S.)
Avoid the reeking herd!
Shun the polluted flock!
Live like that stoic bird,
The eagle of the rock!

Harvey turns around. Mr. Boats -- a portly, African-American maintenance worker wearing a bow-tie -- steps into Harvey's row. He has a tool box.

HARVEY
 Huh? Oh. Hiya, Mr. Boats.

Harvey resumes shelving.

BOATS
 You know what that means, son?

HARVEY

Yeah. It's from an Elinor Hoyt
Wylie poem. It means stay away
from the crowds of common ordinary
people an' do yer own thing.

Mr. Boats laughs.

BOATS

Nope, it means don't compromise
yourself for women. Ain't gonna do
you no good! Get away from 'em as
soon as you can!

HARVEY

Well I ain't got no woman now. So
I'm living like the stoic bird,
man.

MR. BOATS

The only way to live, son.

Somehow this doesn't make Harvey feel any better about his
life.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

Harvey carries an armful of files. Mr. Boats still trails
him, lugging his tool box.

Suddenly, Mr. Boats points out a young African-American FILE
CLERK wearing a pair of big headphones on his afro. He moves
as if he's listening to music.

MR. BOATS

Look at that fool over there.
What's he wearing?

HARVEY

Huh? That's an A.M.-F.M. radio
he's listening to... They got 'em
fixed up now like a pair of
 earmuffs.

MR. BOATS

(INAPPROPRIATELY ANGERED)

MMPH! Isn't that somethin! People
have gone crazy. They'll buy any
kinda junk! Probably listening to
that loud rock stuff. Junk, junk,
it's all junk!

HARVEY

Well, I don't know. Rock music's got some good qualities. I mean it ain't jazz or nothin'.

Mr. Boats looks at him like he's crazy.

MR. BOATS

Say, when you gonna bring me in some good records? Some Nat "King" Cole with Strings...

HARVEY

I don't got any of that, Mr. Boats...

Mr. Boats stops and yells down the hall at Harvey.

MR. BOATS

Yeah, you got it... You're keepin' it at home, though! You won't turn loose the good stuff... You just sell the junk!

Harvey shakes his head as Mr. Boats finishes his diatribe. Mr. Boats turns into a room.

MR. BOATS (cont'd)

(singing)

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa. Men have named you.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

Harvey sits on outdoor furniture. A few props are featured in the frame indicating a garage-sale-like setting (including a record player). Directly in front of Harvey are boxes of used records.

HARVEY shows us his prodigious record collection. Thousands of LP's -- rare jazz, blues, fusion, klezmer, etc. -- are piled in floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

He tells us about his love of jazz and how he started writing jazz reviews and music articles. He finds the first record that he reviewed and puts it on his turntable. As the music plays...

Harvey talks about how he started buying and selling records. This leads into how he first met ROBERT CRUMB.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CLEVELAND GARAGE SALE - FALL - 1962 - DAY

INTERTITLE: 1962

HARVEY (a little more hair but the exact same style) and a bunch of his BUDDIES sift through old records at a junk sale.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

In the early sixties I was with some buddies at a junk sale looking for some choice sides when I met this shy, retiring cat from Philadelphia named Bob Crumb. You know the guy; Fritz the Cat, Mr. Natural an' all-- they made a movie about him, too.

One of Harvey's pals -- MARTY -- pulls a record out of a box.

MARTY

C'mon, Harv. You dig Jay McShann. You gonna buy that or what?

Harvey jumps up from his search to check out the LP.

HARVEY

I don't know, Marty. It's got a lamination crack in it...
(checking out the price)
A quarter. Maybe I can get him down.

MARTY

You are one cheap bastard Harvey.

HARVEY

Yeah, I know I'm tight, man, but I live on a government wage.

A skinny guy with a big nose, glasses and a ratty trench coat taps Harvey on the shoulder. He is soft-spoken, a bit shy and very odd - a young ROBERT CRUMB.

CRUMB

You collect Jay McShann, man?

HARVEY

Yeah, man. How 'bout you?

CRUMB

Yeah but most of my records are
back in Philly.

A greaser-type guy in a leather jacket, PAHLS, joins them.

PAHLS

Harv, meet my buddy Bob Crumb. He
just moved to town. He's an artist
at American Greeting Card Company.

HARVEY

That's cool.

PAHLS

You should see his comics, Harv.
They are outta sight.

HARVEY

(interested)

Yeah? I'm into comics myself.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - FALL - 1962 - DAY

A disheveled mess that gives new meaning to the term bachelor
pad. Records and books are strewn everywhere.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

So Crumb showed me this comic book
novel he was working on -- THE BIG
YUM YUM BOOK. I'd never seen
anything like it.

HARVEY marches back and forth holding Crumb's illustrated
comic novel. CRUMB sits on the floor nursing a beer and
sorting through vintage comic books. Harvey's bursting with
so much enthusiasm, it's almost aggressive.

HARVEY

It's terrific, man! I really dig
your work.

Crumb ignores Harvey's praise.

CRUMB

(holding up a vintage
comic)

CRUMB(cont'd)

This PETER WHEAT book is by Walt Kelly... It's pretty rare.

HARVEY

Yeah? Can I get good bread for it?

CRUMB

Nah! Not yet.

Harvey flops down in an overstuffed chair. Stuffing flies out. He sips his beer.

HARVEY

Listen man, let's get back to your book. What are you gonna do with it?

CRUMB

(looking up)

I hadn't thought about it. It's just an exercise.

Harvey flips through the book.

HARVEY

It's more than an exercise. It's breaking ground, man. There's some wild shit in here.

Crumb is immune to Harvey's enthusiasm.

CRUMB

You're spitting on me, Harvey.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - FALL - 1962 - LATER

CRUMB lies on the couch sketching while HARVEY reads more of THE YUM YUM BOOK. A scratchy jazz record plays.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Crumb and I hung out a lot back then. We had records and comics in common.

ANGLE ON CRUMB'S DRAWING

We see Crumb is actually sketching Harvey, slumped in a chair reading a book. Crumb makes Harvey look like a smelly, sweaty madman with ratty clothing.

Crumb holds the sketch of Harvey up to show him.

CRUMB
(laughing)
Check it out, man. Pretty scary.

Harvey glances up at his portrait, completely unself-conscious.

HARVEY
Yeah, ya don't know the half of it.

Harvey goes back to reading. Crumb back to sketching.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
Eventually people got hip to
Crumb's art work and he started
hangin' out with a Bohemian crowd.
After a while, he got sick of
greeting cards and moved away to
San Francisco where he got the
whole underground comic scene off
the ground.

Crumb slowly evaporates from the room, leaving Harvey totally alone.

ANGLE ON 45 RECORD SPINNING AND SPINNING

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
He'd come back ta Cleveland every
few years, an' people'd treat him
like a celebrity.

The record spins and spins ...

END FLASHBACK

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - 1975 - DAY

ANOTHER R. CRUMB DRAWING OF HARVEY (Now circa 1975)

On a sketch pad we see a deranged, tormented Harvey sitting alone on a park bench. He pulls at his hair, and looks as though he may murder the next person who walks by.

INTERTITLE: BACK TO 1975

As the pencil adds shading to Harvey's face, WE HEAR:

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Once he came to visit when I was really feelin' bad. It was right around the time of my throat operation, an' right after my second wife left me. At first it was pretty weird. I mean, here my life was falling apart an' everything was going great for him. I was on my second divorce an' he was a big hit with the chicks. I was a nothin' file clerk and he was this famous cartoonist.

HARVEY and R. CRUMB sit on a park bench together by a bus stop. A distraught Harvey whines while Crumb just sketches. Harvey's voice is still raspy.

HARVEY

I dunno, man. On the one hand most women gettin' graduate degrees wouldn't give a guy like me the time a' day. An' she married me an' everything, so I gotta give her some kinda credit. But then she got so mean to me in the end. An' it ain't like I tried t'keep her captive or anything like that, y'know?

Crumb may or may not be listening to Harvey. It's hard to tell.

HARVEY (cont'd)

An' then on top of it I lost my voice for three months. I still sound like shit, but before I had nothin'. Man, talk about hell. I started forgettin' what I sound like, y'know? So I started writin' stuff down--stories an' things, my points a' view, ideas. I even published a couple jazz record reviews. I guess that ended up bein' a good thing.

CRUMB

Uh-huh.

HARVEY

But don't think I buy into this "growth" crap.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Everybody talks about how bad experiences can cause ya t'grow, an' all that cliched stuff. I've had enough bad experiences and growth to last me plenty.

(a beat)

Right now, I'd be glad to trade some growth for happiness.

For a moment, they both just sit there saying nothing to each other, each man in his own private universe.

Finally Harvey looks over to Crumb.

HARVEY (cont'd)

So how long are ya stayin' in Cleveland?

Crumb never looks up from his picture.

CRUMB

I dunno, man. I gotta go visit this chick in New York. And I'm really busy with the comic book stuff. It's good bread and all man but I'm getting fed up with the whole scene.

HARVEY

What are ya talkin' about? Yer makin' a good living doin' yer art? Sheesh. How many guys get that lucky in their life, huh?

CRUMB

Yeah, I dunno.

HARVEY

Ya know man, people are startin' to know the name "Crumb." When you croak you're gonna leave something behind.

CRUMB

Yeah, my ashes and some crappy doodles. It's not like I'm Blind Lemon Jefferson or Big Mama Thornton.

HARVEY

C'mon, man. It sure beats workin' a gig like mine -- being a nobody flunky and sellin' records on the side for a buck.

CRUMB

Yeah, well that's true ...

Harvey nods in agreement, mulling this over. He's not at all offended.

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1975 - DAY

CLOSE ON A FILE DRAWER MARKED: "RECENTLY DECEASED."

A hand reaches into the frame and opens the drawer.

By rote, HARVEY fumbles with a large stack of "expired patient" files. He places each into the appropriate alphabetical "deceased" drawer.

Attempting to grab another batch, Harvey accidentally knocks the entire pile onto the floor.

HARVEY

Damn it!

He crouches down to survey the mess -- a collage of "expired lives" laid out before his eyes.

We move past dozens of anonymous names -- William Anderson, Louis Collins, Mark D'Amico, Tyrone Moore, Franklin Ray, etc... Each file has a red "Deceased" stamp.

Depressed, HARVEY is transfixed by the files surrounding him on the floor. Suddenly he stops and picks one up.

ANGLE ON FOLDER: It is marked, "CHARLIE MARSHALL."

He opens the folder and reads the stats...

Born: 1920 in Cleveland
Died: 1920 in Cleveland
Occupation: Clerk

ANGLE ON HARVEY: He swallows hard as he reads about Charlie's small, invisible and now vanished life...

He tosses the folder back onto the pile.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1975 - MORNING

CLOSE ON: TWO STICK FIGURES IN AN EMPTY FRAME

HARVEY sits at a table with a pen in hand and a blank sheet of paper in front of him. Nothing seems to come to him.

He flips through a pile of comic books -- everything from D.C. Comic Super Heroes to underground works such as Crumb's Mr. Natural and Zap Comix. No inspiration. Harvey throws them down in frustration.

HARVEY
I'm starvin'.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - 1975 - DAY

HARVEY pushes a cart through the cramped aisles of a crowded supermarket. He pulls a few cans of Beef-A-Roni off the shelf and heads off to pay. Reaching the check-out area, he evaluates the situation.

ANGLE ON CHECK-OUT COUNTERS:

There are three lines to choose from. Two of the counters have long waits. The third is much shorter but there is an OLD JEWISH LADY next in line.

SUDDENLY, THE SCREEN SPLITS IN TWO:

The LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME remains Harvey at the supermarket deliberating over the check-out lines.

However, the RIGHT SIDE OF THE FRAME now contains a CRUMB STYLE COMIC PANEL DEPICTING THE EXACT SAME SCENARIO. A BUBBLE appears over CARTOON HARVEY'S head revealing his thoughts. It reads: *"Pickin' the right check-out line is an art...There's a lot of things you gotta consider."*

ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME... Harvey decides to get behind the Old Lady.

MEANWHILE ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE OF THE FRAME... Cartoon Harvey stands behind the Old Lady.

A new BUBBLE reads: *"It may be the shortest line but I am takin' a chance 'cause she's an Old Jewish Lady."*

BACK TO THE LEFT SIDE OF THE FRAME... The CASHIER rings up the Old Lady's purchases -- a few kitchen glasses.

OLD JEWISH LADY

(Yiddish Accent)

Listen, goily, dese glasses are six for \$2.00 because I couldn't carry twelf... But I wanted twelf so today I'm buying six more... But you should only charge me \$1.50 for dem... It's ok, you can esk de meneger.

Harvey rolls his eyes and stamps his foot impatiently. He knows he's in trouble now.

CASHIER

(yelling)

Frank! I need a price check.

SUDDENLY, THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE SCREEN BECOMES FULLY ANIMATED... Instead of still comic panels with balloons, the Cartoon Harvey now rants directly into the camera.

CARTOON HARVEY

Man, Old Jewish Ladies will argue forever with a cashier about anything. Get behind them in a line an' yer gonna wait forever!

The Human Harvey seems oblivious to his cartoon replica. He impatiently leans on his cart, waiting and seething.

CARTOON HARVEY (cont'd)

I mean, I'm a yid myself, an' the women in my family are like that... But I never got used to it... I may be cheap, but I got limits!

ON THE LEFT HAND SIDE OF THE SCREEN... The MANAGER finally arrives. The Old Lady haggles with him, too.

OLD JEWISH LADY

Please. Let me 'splain von more time.

MEANWHILE ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE... The Cartoon Harvey turns to address the Human Harvey, who actually looks him in the eyes. It now seems Human Harvey can actually hear his cartoon alter ego.

CARTOON HARVEY

Wake up! You're whole life's gettin' eaten away by this kinda crap! What kind of existence is this?

CARTOON HARVEY (cont'd)

Is this all a workin' stiff like
you can expect? Ya gonna suffer in
silence fer the rest a' yer life?!
Or ya gonna make a mark. Huh?
Huh?

IN AN INSTANT, THE CARTOON HARVEY DISAPPEARS AND THE LIVE
ACTION SCENE TAKES OVER THE WHOLE FRAME.

Suddenly motivated by an odd notion, Harvey abandons his
grocery cart and runs out of the supermarket.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Bursting with ideas, Harvey (wearing his undershirt and
boxers) starts story-boarding his first comic with stick
figures.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN - 1975 - MORNING

A bleary-eyed HARVEY, still clad in an undershirt and boxers,
dozes off over a bowl of Corn Flakes. On the table next to
some spilled milk are a stack of papers covered with
scribbling. He clearly has been slaving over this work all
night.

ANGLE ON PAPERS:

At the top is a quickly scribbled title, "Standing Behind Old
Jewish Ladies In Supermarket Lines."

These are ad hoc versions of a comic book. The pages are
divided like a tick-tack-toe board. Each square is filled
with crude stick figure drawings and lots of writing.

An alarm clock goes off. Harvey's eyes fly open.

HARVEY

Shit. Work.

Harvey yawns, then notices the pile of papers. He peruses
them, proud of his work. He gets up and looks out the
window.

I/E. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - HARVEY'S POV - 1975 - MORNING

It is yet another grey day in Cleveland. The neighborhood is run-down. Garbage is strewn everywhere.

The following scene unfolds through the window:

Two UNSIGHTLY WORKERS lug an old, smelly mattress from a garage towards the garbage cans on the curb. Their conversation is distant, but entirely audible.

MATTRESS GUY #1

So how smart is she?

MATTRESS GUY #2

I dunno. I guess she's about average.

MATTRESS GUY #1

Average? Hey, man. Average is dumb!

They drop the mattress in place. With the window framing these guys, the scene FREEZES, looking just like a comic book panel.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Harvey turns around from the scene and ponders it. He moves back towards his pile of stick-figure drawings.

CLOSE ON PAPER

Harvey scribbles the words "AMERICAN SPLENDOR" at the top of the page.

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND DINER - 1975 - DAY

The following scene is shot through the restaurant window. We see reflections of people walking by.

A tense HARVEY starts at CRUMB as he eats a burger and reads Harvey's mock-ups. Harvey doesn't touch his burger deluxe and nervously talks in his laryngitis-afflicted voice.

HARVEY

See, ever since I read your stuff, man I've been thinking I could write comic book stories that were different from anything being done.

CRUMB

(munching on a fry)
Uh-huh.

HARVEY

I'm thinkin', the guys who do animal comics and super-hero stuff are really limited 'cause they gotta try to appeal to kids. And underground comics like yours have been really subversive or opened things up politically. But there is still plenty more ta be done with 'em, too, y'know?

CRUMB

Pass me the ketchup?

HARVEY

I mean with pictures and words, it could be more of an art form. Like those French movies are. Or De Sica over in Italy, y'know? ... So I tried writin' some things about real life. Stuff the everyman's gotta deal with.

Crumb finally looks up from Harvey's work.

CRUMB

These are about you.

HARVEY

Er, yeah ...

CRUMB

You turned yourself into a comic hero?

HARVEY

Sorta, yeah. But no idealized shit. No phony bullshit. The real thing, y'know? Ordinary life is pretty complex stuff.

Crumb reads more. Harvey waits anxiously. Finally Crumb starts to chuckle.

CRUMB
These are really good, Harv.

HARVEY
(insecure)
Really? Ya think so?

Crumb shuffles through more.

CRUMB
Yeah. This is great stuff, man. I dig it. Can I take them home and illustrate them?

Harvey is practically bursting.

HARVEY
Wow!!

Harvey's voice breaks like a kid in puberty. He clears his throat. And something miraculous happens...

When Harvey opens his mouth to speak his LARYNGITIS IS GONE!

HARVEY (cont'd)
You'd do that for me, man? That'd be great! I can't draw a straight line!

CRUMB
Hey, what's up with your voice, Harv? All of a sudden it sounds fine.

HARVEY
(thrilled)
I don't know, man! I guess you cured me!

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - SNACK ROOM HALLWAY - DAY

HARVEY bounds towards the snack room where a group of hospital workers and patients hang out. He bangs on the window to get their attention. When they look up, Harvey waves a comic book in the air.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - SNACK ROOM - DAY

A GLOSSY, FULL-COLOR COMIC BOOK FEATURING THE TWO MATTRESS GUYS: Scrawled across the top in big red letters reads, "AMERICAN SPLENDOR. Vol. #1"

A man's finger points to the words, "All Stories by Harvey Pekar. Art by R. Crumb."

The comic book sits atop a table in the dreary snack room. A crowd of HOSPITAL WORKERS, PATIENTS, DOCTORS, MAINTENANCE WORKERS, etc. (under ten total) gather around a proud HARVEY who shows off his work. For the first time, he seems almost happy.

HARVEY

(beaming)

See that? All stories by yours truly.

A WWII VET PATIENT with a portable IV cranes to get a glimpse.

WW II VET PATIENT

Hot off the presses, huh? We got a regular Hemingway here.

HARVEY

No way, Jack, I don't go in for that macho crap.

DOCTOR #3 chimes in.

DOCTOR #3

I didn't know you could draw, Pekar.

HARVEY

Nah! I don't draw. I just write the stories. A buddy of mine and some of his friends do the art work.

TOBY, the supernerd from the bus stop, grabs the comic book off the table and peruses it.

TOBY

Harvey, am I in here? You promised I would be in here.

HARVEY

Yeah! Yeah! You're in there,
alright? Jeez, Toby.

SUDDENLY, MR. BOATS -- Harvey's philosophical co-worker -- pushes his way thorough the crowd. He snatches the comic out of Toby's hand.

MR. BOATS

Let me see this.

TOBY

Mr. Boats, it's not polite to grab things. Next time--

MR. BOATS

Son, you done good. Ya know, I was up in Toronto a few weeks back an' I saw the Red Chinese Ballet...

As Mr. Boats talks, the crowd starts to disperse.

MR. BOATS (cont'd)

Now that was beautiful. The way those people were dancing together. Those Chinese work hard. I tell ya, they work hard -- Where is everybody goin'?

Mr. Boats hands the comic book back to Harvey and turns on his heels. Through the window he notices TWO VETS IN WHEELCHAIRS moving down the hall.

MR. BOATS (cont'd)

Where these sickly men rushin' off to? They ain't goin' nowhere for now. Maybe not for a long time. But damn if they ain't in a rush to get there.

Harvey stands there, his moment of glory passed. But it's okay. He flips through his comic and smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET CORNER - ASSOC. OF POLISH WOMEN - 1975 - DAY

A motley group of GUYS hang out on a street corner in front of the Association of Polish Women. HARVEY heads towards them.

MARTY

Hey look guys, here comes Captain America.

Harvey rolls his eyes.

PAHLS

(yelling out)

You gonna hang with the boys now that yer a comic book star?

Harvey turns red. He's embarrassed but part of him loves the attention.

HARVEY

Cut it out. Man, I ain't nothin' yet compared to Bob Crumb.

GUY #3

Ah, listen to him. One lousy comic book and he wants to be Crumb.

The GUYS laugh.

ANGLE ON SILENT GUY

A SILENT GUY crouches by the wall, reading his CLEVELAND BROWNS trading cards.

PAHLS

Hey Harvey, if ya wanna make comics for adults, ya oughtta put some dirty stuff in it.

GUY #3

Yeah, you can write about Marty's sex life.

Harvey hangs with the guys but he doesn't engage. He seems to be observing them more than interacting with them.

GUY #3 (cont'd)

Right Marty? I heard ya went out with Bonnie yesterday.

PAHLS

Yeah. Howdja do? Wudja git offa her?

MARTY

Ah, lousy. All's I got wuz arm-around.

The guys all stare at him for a moment. Then they crack up.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CLOSE UP:

A COPY OF AMERICAN SPLENDOR #2: A FULL-COLOR CARTOON VERSION OF THE ABOVE SCENE GRACES THE COVER.

A MARTY LOOK-ALIKE is bombarded with questions about his date with Bonnie. He complains that all he got was "arm-around."

The REAL HARVEY holds the above comic book in his hand. The stage is set with a few items that indicate a comic book store. HARVEY talks about a couple of "American Splendor" issues and how they impacted his life -- recognition as a writer, etc. He gives his philosophy about the comic book, etc.

A MONTAGE OF AMERICAN SPLENDOR COVERS (ISSUE #3, #4, #5, #6, ETC.) THEY INDICATE A PASSAGE OF TIME ...

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S CUBICLE - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY sits alone in his cubicle. He doodles stick figures on a pad -- some ideas for a new comic. His posture's miserable. He rubs his temples like he's in anguish.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man eight comics later, a brand new decade, same old bullshit. Yeah sure, he gets lots of recognition for his writin' now. Sure his comics are praised by all the important media types tellin' people what to think. But so what? It's not like he makes a livin' at it like Bob Crumb. He can't go an' quit his day job or nothin'.

JUMP CUT SEQUENCE

Several shots of Harvey just thinking, scratching his face with a pencil, tapping his foot nervously.

Each shot is separated by a second or two of black (an homage to Harvey's wordless panels). Finally, he goes back to writing.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
Who am I kiddin'. Truth is I'd be
lost without my work routine.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

Alone in bed, Harvey wakes up in a cold sweat from a nightmare. He looks horrified, short of breath.

HARVEY
(calming himself down)
I got a job ... I got a job ...

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S CUBICLE - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY scratches his head.

CLOSE UP ON HIS DOODLING

Harvey writes "I got a job" in a balloon over the stick figure's head.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
So -- to stave off desperation and
feelings of uselessness -- I
resigned myself to a menial
existence. But hey, maybe the guy
who's had a happy life feels worse
just before he dies than th' guy
who had a sad one. Or, maybe not.
I dunno. Maybe I just needed a
woman.

Toby comes in, decked out in plaid and stripes. He has an empty messenger bag.

TOBY
Hi, Harvey. Do you want these
gourmet jelly beans? I gave up
sweets for lent.

Harvey turns around. He seems down, depressed.

HARVEY
Huh? Sure, I'll take 'em.

Toby watches Harvey eat a few.

HARVEY (cont'd)
Hey, watermelon. That's pretty good.

TOBY
I recommend the piña coladas. They are excellent and very authentic tasting.

Toby heads down a file row and proceeds to take a few off the shelves, stuffing his bag. Harvey gets up and comes after him.

HARVEY
Hey Toby, can you eat lentils during lent?

TOBY
Sure. I don't see why not. You can't eat meat on certain days, but lentils should be acceptable anytime.

HARVEY
Ya think there's any connection between lentils and lent?

TOBY
I don't think so but I'll ask Sister Mary Fred at church on Sunday.

HARVEY
Sister Mary Fred, huh? Is she cute? Sounds kinda mannish but who am I to be picky.

TOBY
Harvey, you're funny. She's a nun.

HARVEY
So what? Maybe she became a nun because she couldn't get a guy.

TOBY
Harvey, she became a nun because she had a higher calling.

HARVEY

Higher calling. That is such a
crock of shit. I don't know why
you waste your time prayin' anyway.

TOBY

Well, Harvey, I like the ritual.
And I'm a very spiritual person.
You know, you should try believing
in something bigger than yourself.
It might cheer you up.

Toby turns on his heels and walks off.

HARVEY

(calling after him)

What? Do I seem depressed, Toby?

Toby doesn't respond.

Harvey shrugs and digs deep into the jelly bean bag. He
pulls out a fistful.

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S HAND

Jellybeans in every imaginable color. Harvey fingers a few
and then picks a blue one.

BOB THE DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Cut!

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL "SET" - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

A few items from the previous scene are present on the sound
stage indicating that it's a set of AMERICAN SPLENDOR -- The
Movie.

THE ACTOR HARVEY stands alone, his hand filled with Jelly
beans.

BOB THE DIRECTOR

Okay, that was great. The bakery
scene is next ...

ACTOR HARVEY steps out of the frame, revealing a craft
service table behind him. At the table, the REAL HARVEY and
the REAL TOBY load up on donuts. The two discuss the food on
the set.

Ironically, the Real Toby is actually more extreme than the Actor who plays him -- even more robotic, and completely incapable of eye-contact.

The REAL TOBY discusses the finer points of nerdism and evaluates the Actor's nerd quotient. The Real Harvey explains to Actor Toby that nothing -- not even gourmet jelly beans -- would have cheered him up at that point in his life. He was too lonely and depressed.

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - MORNING

Light pours through the curtained window.

Naked and disheveled, HARVEY tosses and turns in bed.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

My loneliness was unbearable, man.
Weekends were the worst. Sometimes
in my sleep, I'd feel a body next
to me like an amputee feels a
phantom limb.

EXT. PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE -- DAY

Extreme wide shot: a city-street overpass spans across the entire frame. The lone figure of Harvey sulks there in the middle, watching traffic pass below.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Sure my comics were bringin' me
notoriety, but my personal life was
in shambles. I thought a little
attention would make me feel
better. It only made me feel
worse.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAKERY SIDE STREET - SPRING - 1980'S - MORNING

It is a beautiful, sunny day. The trees are in bloom. There's the first scent of spring in the air. Kids play in the street. Music pours out of passing cars. Everyone seems to have a smile on his or her face except HARVEY. He walks on the shadowy side of the street.

EXT. BAKERY STREET - SPRING

Establishing shot of HARVEY trudging into the bakery.

INT. BAKERY - SPRING - 1980'S - MORNING

A couple of WOMEN order bread and cookies from TWO COUNTER GIRLS.

HARVEY surveys the donuts.

COUNTER GIRL #1
(yelling to Harvey)
Next!

HARVEY
(to the Counter Girl)
Yeah! I'll have two crullers, a
jelly donut with powdered sugar...
And you got any "day old bread"?

A woman with attractive Irish looks brushes past Harvey on her way to the door. This is ALICE QUINN, roughly Harvey's age but there is a tired, weary look in her eyes.

ALICE
Hey, you're Harvey Pekar.

Half in a daze, Harvey stares at the chick.

HARVEY
Yeah...

ALICE
Alice Quinn. From school.

Harvey studies her face. Suddenly, it clicks.

HARVEY
Oh yeah. College. We had a couple
lit classes together.

Harvey pays and receives his items. They step back towards the door.

ALICE
What happened to you? You just
disappeared after one semester.

Harvey scratches his armpit.

HARVEY

I know, man. I got good grades and all but there was this required math class. I can't do math, an' that required class hangin' over my head made me crazy. Eventually the pressure got to be too much.

ALICE

Well, you're doing okay anyway. I heard all about your jazz reviews and your comics.

This perks Harvey up.

HARVEY

Ya did?

ALICE

Sure, you're famous. Meanwhile I got my degree but I'm just a plain old wife and mother.

Harvey stares at her wedding ring. His face drops.

HARVEY

Yeah. I'm not doing as great as ya think. My second wife divorced me and I work at a dead end job as a file clerk. Sometimes I hang out with the guys on the corner but most of the time I just stay home by myself and read.

Alice laughs.

ALICE

You're luckier than you think. My husband and kids make it impossible for me to cuddle up with a good book.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAKERY - SPRING - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and ALICE continue their conversation as they stroll towards her car.

HARVEY

I'm reading this book by Dreiser now -- JENNIE GERHARDT.

ALICE
That's one of my favorites.

HARVEY
I hope it don't end like so many a'
those naturalist novels... With
someone getting crushed ta earth by
forces he can't control.

Alice smiles.

ALICE
I think you'll be pleasantly
surprised. It's certainly not a
Hollywood happy ending, but it's
pretty truthful. Which is rare
these days ...

This hits home with Harvey. He can't believe he's made such
a connection with this woman.

Alice stops in front of a beat-up station wagon.

ALICE (cont'd)
This is me.

HARVEY
Nice car. I don't have one yet.

ALICE
Can I give ya a lift somewhere?

HARVEY
Nah. It's a nice day. I'll just
walk.

Harvey looks down, a little sad.

ALICE
Well, we should have you over
sometime for dinner.

HARVEY
Sure, I'd be glad t'come. But if
you really wanna do me a favor,
introduce me to some a' your single
girlfriends. I bet they're all
smart like you. I'm no catch,
though, so I'll take anything you
can get me.

Alice pecks Harvey on the cheek.

ALICE
I'll work on it.

She gets into the car.

ALICE (cont'd)
Nice seeing ya Harvey.

Harvey watches as she drives off.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
When I got home, I finished reading
JENNIE GERHARDT. It was real good,
way better than I expected. That
Alice wuz right.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - SPRING - 1980'S - NIGHT

The room is moody, dark and lonely. The shadowy figure of
Harvey sits on the floor devouring JENNIE GERHARDT.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
Sure Lester -- the main character --
croaks in the end, but at least
he's old and dies a natural
dignified death.

THE CAMERA TRAVELS AROUND THE ROOM TO FIND: Harvey again,
now silhouetted in the door frame, still clutching the book
and obsessed by his thoughts.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
I was more alone that weekend than
any. All I did was think about
JENNIE GERHARDT an' Alice Quinn an'
all the decades of people I have
known.

THE CAMERA TRAVELS AGAIN TO FIND Harvey sitting on a chair in
the corner of his room. His head is bowed. His shoulders
slump over, as if he's struggling with something weighty.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
The more I thought, the more I felt
like cryin'; Life seemed so sweet
an' so sad an' so hard t'let go of
in the end.

THE CAMERA TRAVELS A FINAL TIME TO FIND: Harvey sprawled
across his couch. But he's not asleep; he's still
obsessing. The book lies on his chest like a lover.

Close up of Harvey's troubled face. Beneath the pain, we see hope and determination.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
 But hey, man. Every day's a brand
 new deal, right? Just keep on
 workin' and sump'n's bound ta turn
 up.

CUT TO:

EXT. COSMIC COMICS STORE - DELAWARE - 1980'S - DAY

An urban comic book shop on a dicey but bohemian street. A title over picture reads, "MEANWHILE, IN DELAWARE."

INT. COSMIC COMICS STORE - 1980'S - DAY

JOYCE BRABNER, a depressive nudge with a perpetually peptic expression frantically searches the store for something. Her partner, a granola type named RAND, finishes unloading a stack on the shelf.

JOYCE
 What happened to the new American
 Splendor?

RAND
 We sold 'em, babe.

JOYCE
 All of them?

RAND
 Yep.

JOYCE
 (accusatory)
 Damn it! I put one aside for
 myself, next to the register. I
 didn't even get a chance to read
 it.

RAND
 Whoa, sorry, Joyce. I didn't know
 you were such a Splendor fan. Next
 time take it home.

Joyce leans against the counter. She pushes up her glasses and looks really upset.

JOYCE

Maybe I'll call the publisher. But they take so damn long. Shit! Why does everything in my life have to be such a complicated disaster ...

Joyce starts slamming things around the store. Finally Rand grabs his stuff.

RAND

Okay, I'm gonna hustle before the vibe in here gets any worse.

Rand leaves. Joyce barely notices, still brewing.

CUT TO:

INT. JOYCE'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

The mess in this room rivals Harvey's. A few cats add to the clutter. Joyce lies on her disheveled bed and writes a letter.

JOYCE (V.O.)

Dear Mr. Pekar,
Greetings from the second smallest state in the union, an endless plastics and nylon plantation controlled by giant chemical corporations.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - VESTIBULE - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY takes his mail out of the box. He finds an oddly decorated envelope.

JOYCE (V.O.)

To make matters more dismal, there are no decent comic book stores in my town, which is why my partner and I opened one ourselves.

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY finishes reading the letter sitting on the toilet. A cat runs around him.

JOYCE (V.O.)

Despite our steadily faltering business, my partner managed to sell the last copy of American Splendor #8 out from under me. I'm a big fan and I hate to wait for a new order. Is there any way I can get it from you direct? Sincerely, Joyce Brabner.

Harvey scratches his head. He mutters to himself.

HARVEY

... man, she's got good lookin' handwritin' ...

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE -- HARVEY AND JOYCE COMMUNICATING

We see Harvey in his bed writing.

HARVEY

Dear Joyce,
Thanks for the letter. Whattya do besides sellin' comics?

THE SCREEN SPLITS TO ACCOMMODATE:

INT. DELAWARE PRISON CLASSROOM - 1980'S - DAY

We see Joyce standing in front of a GROUP OF PRISONERS.

JOYCE (V.O.)

I'm a sometime activist and I teach writing to prisoners. I try to help them build an interior life and make art out of their monotonous, suffocating routine.

THE SCREEN GIVES WAY TO ANOTHER FRAME

INT. BUS - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY scribbles a letter while riding on the bus.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Sounds familiar. So you married or what?

INT. JOYCE'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce empties her can of cat food in a plate and slides it towards her kitty.

JOYCE (V.O.)
I'm divorced, thank god.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - EVENING

Now we see Harvey (full screen) in bed in his underwear talking on the PHONE. He's clipping his toe nails.

HARVEY
Look, I think you an' I got a lot in common. How am I gonna get you to come visit me in Cleveland?

JOYCE (V.O.)
Cleveland? You think that's a good idea?

HARVEY
It's a great idea. You should meet me, 'cause I'm a great guy. Despite the way my comics read, I got a lot of redeeming characteristics.

CLIP! He clips off a big one.

THE SCREEN SPLITS TO REVEAL

INT. JOYCE'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - NIGHT

Joyce sits on her equally disheveled bed dunking a tea bag. Her hair is wet from a shower.

JOYCE
I don't know. Where would I stay?

HARVEY (V.O.)
With me. Don't worry, I'm not gonna put no moves on you or anything.

JOYCE
I'm not worried about that ...
(fumbling with a tea cup)

JOYCE(cont'd)

Hold on, I just spilled chamomile
tea all over my bathrobe.

HARVEY (V.O.)

So what are ya worried about then?

Joyce sighs and lies down. A variety of AMERICAN SPLENDORS
are across her bed. Different interpretations of Harvey
stare up at her.

JOYCE

(sipping)

Well, the way all those different
artists draw you, I don't quite
know what to expect. I mean
sometimes you look like a younger
Brando, but then the way Crumb
draws you -- like a hairy ape with
all those stinky, wavy lines
radiating off your body -- it's
kind of scary.

HARVEY (V.O.)

Those are motion lines. I'm an
active guy. Anyway, just come out
here an' I'll try to be anyone you
want me ta be.

Joyce smiles for the first time.

JOYCE

That's a dangerous offer. I'm a
notorious reformer ...

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - ARRIVALS GATE - 1980'S - DAY

A nervous JOYCE walks off the plane into the arrivals area.
She scans the crowd of friends, family, lovers and limo
drivers waiting to meet the disembarking passengers. Where
is Harvey? What will he look like?

As Joyce surveys the unfamiliar faces, she imagines different
versions of an animated, illustrated Harvey among the people.

She double-takes as sees the R. CRUMB HARVEY -- hairy, scary,
smelly and picking his nose. Joyce rubs her eyes.

Next she sees the BRANDO HARVEY (Gary Dumm), but
unfortunately he disappears fast.

Disappointed, Joyce notices the realistic DREW FRIEDMAN HARVEY walking towards her. She smiles as he dissolves into:

HARVEY (O.S.)

Hey. Are you Joyce?

Joyce turns around. The flesh and blood HARVEY PEKAR stands before her -- not quite as bad as the Crumb version, not quite as good as the Dumm version, but still acceptable. She sighs with relief.

JOYCE

Hi, Harvey. We finally meet in person.

She politely offers her hand. Harvey shakes it, but he looks overwhelmed, worried and pessimistic.

HARVEY

Hiya. Look, before we get started with any of this, ya might as well know right off the bat. I had a vasectomy.

Joyce lets go of his hand. She stares at him in disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. TGIF STYLE RESTAURANT - 1980'S - NIGHT

The most awkward date in history. Seated in an ultra-yuppie restaurant filled with business lunchers, Harvey and Joyce hide behind their menus. While everyone else looks slick and successful, these two compete for the world's worst posture.

HARVEY

What's wrong?

JOYCE

Nothing.

HARVEY

Somethin's wrong. Yer lookin' around everywhere.

JOYCE

I guess I never imagined you eating in a place like this.

HARVEY

Me? I never been here. I thought you'd like it. But obviously ya don't, do ya?

JOYCE

It's fine. What difference does it make?

Harvey shakes his head, feeling more pessimistic.

HARVEY

I dunno. None, I guess.

(beat)

They sure got a lot of meat on this menu.

JOYCE

You're a vegetarian?

HARVEY

Kinda. I mean ever since I got a pet cat, I couldn't eat animals anymore.

Joyce grabs a bread stick.

JOYCE

Hmm. I support and identify with groups like PETA, but unfortunately I'm a self-diagnosed anemic. Also, I have all these food allergies to vegetables that give me serious intestinal distress. I guess I have a lot of borderline health disorders that limit me politically when it comes to eating.

Harvey just stares at her.

HARVEY

Wow. Yer a sick woman, huh?

JOYCE

Not yet. But I expect to be. Everyone in my family's got some kind of degenerative illness.

A cheery waitress bounces over.

WAITRESS

(sing song)

Good afternoon!

WAITRESS(cont'd)

I'm your server Cindy! What can I bring you two today?

They slowly look up at her.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - NIGHT

JOYCE and HARVEY enter the apartment. The place is a mess, as usual.

HARVEY

Look, I was gonna clean up, but why should I give you any false notions? The truth is I got a serious problem with cleanliness. I could wash a dish ten times and it'd still dirty. They even kicked me outta the Army 'cause I couldn't learn ta make a bed.

Joyce puts down her bag.

JOYCE

I've seen worse.

She slumps down on the sofa as if she's been here a million times. She rubs her head. Harvey sits next to her.

JOYCE (cont'd)

Harvey, go get me water and a few aspirin.

Harvey just bounces back up and obeys.

HARVEY

What, ya got a headache?

JOYCE

No, but I want to avoid one.

Harvey empties the aspirin bottle in his palm. For some reason, he's feeling more comfortable.

HARVEY

Well lemme tell ya Joyce, it sure is nice ta have company. I mean, despite all your problems, you seem like a great person. An' hey, sorry if my dating skills are kinda rusty, but I've just been through hell and back with women.

HARVEY (cont'd)

I mean that last one turned out to
be a real nasty bitch.

Harvey arrives back with the aspirin. He hands it to Joyce.

JOYCE

I had a nice time with you, too.

Joyce swallows the pill. Harvey sits down next to her.

HARVEY

Yeah? You had a nice time?

JOYCE

Don't make people repeat
themselves. It's annoying.

HARVEY

Oh, sorry.

They're inches away from each other.

JOYCE

C'mere ...

She pulls him close. Harvey plants a kiss on her.

They slowly separate. Joyce's eyes are closed. She likes
him. He kisses her again. They start making out, moaning a
bit.

But before it gets heavy--

JOYCE (cont'd)

Harvey?

HARVEY

Yeah?

Joyce opens her eyes. She looks uneasy.

JOYCE

Which door's the bathroom?

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - 1980'S - DAY

Harvey stands by the bathroom door, despondent. From inside
we hear the sounds of moaning and flushing.

HARVEY

Hey, Joyce! What's wrong? What is it?

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - DAY

FLUSH! Joyce is doubled over on the toilet. She's looking green.

JOYCE

Ugh! I don't know. I think that yuppie food did me in.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - DAY

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

HARVEY

I feel terrible. Lemme at least do something for you.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Joyce gets to her feet and puts her glasses back on. She picks up a can and sprays air freshener around the room. Then she looks at the can and realizes it's WD-40.

HARVEY

Can I make ya something? How about some chamomile tea?

Joyce puts the can down.

JOYCE

Chamomile tea? What the hell's a guy like you doing with that? I thought you drink soda pop for breakfast.

HARVEY (O.S.)

I dunno. I noticed you drank a lot of it when we started talkin' on the phone. So I stocked up on herbal teas for your visit.

Joyce turns her head to the door. She's truly surprised by what Harvey's just said. And very moved. She smiles to herself.

BACK TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM DOOR - DAY

Harvey stands there waiting.

HARVEY

The girl at the Food Co-op picked me out all kinds of herbal stuff. One of 'ems good for stomachaches. Grandma Bear's Tummy Mint, I think. Are you still there?

Joyce slowly opens the door. She leans against the door frame like she's just been through a war.

She takes off her glasses and cleans them off with her shirt.

JOYCE

Harvey, we better skip this whole courtship thing and just get married.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

Harvey and Joyce are in bed, lying in each other's arms. They look quite contented.

HARVEY

Man, am I glad I talked you into comin' up here. Any more time alone and I mighta lost it fer good.

JOYCE

Me too.

HARVEY

So you don't have any problems with movin' to Cleveland?

JOYCE

Not really. I find most American cities depressing in the same way.

HARVEY
An' yer okay with the vasectomy
thing?

She shrugs.

EXT. PARKING LOT - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY approaches the building. Instead of dragging his feet like usual, he seems to be floating on a cloud. We haven't seen Harvey this happy since... well, since never.

He stops by a junker car and peeks in the window, finding TOBY eating lunch alone. He has an entire White Castle smorgasbord spread across the front seat.

Harvey knocks on the window. Toby rolls it down.

HARVEY
Ay Toby.

TOBY
(mouth full)
No you can't have any of my White
Castle hamburgers so please don't
even ask.

HARVEY
Can I have a fry?

Harvey reaches for a handful of Toby's fries.

TOBY
Okay, but just a couple, Harvey.
I'm not going to eat dinner until
very late and this has got to hold
me over.

Harvey leans in, always amused by Toby. He steals another fry.

HARVEY
(munching)
Whattya got, a church function?

TOBY
No, I'm driving to Toledo to see a
movie. Would you like to come?

HARVEY
Nah. I gotta fly to Delaware
tonight. I'm gettin' married.

TOBY

Oh. Why Delaware?

HARVEY

The chick I'm marryin' is from Wilmington. Plus, I gotta help her move her stuff here.

(a beat)

Why you drivin' ta Toledo to see a movie?

TOBY

It's not playing at the Mapletown.

(a beat)

I didn't know you had a girlfriend, Harvey.

HARVEY

Yeah. We met last week.

Harvey opens the car door and slides in with Toby.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Toby, what movie could possibly be worth drivin' 260 miles round trip for?

TOBY

It's a new film called "Revenge of the Nerds." It's about a group of nerd college students who are being picked on all the time by the jocks, so they decide to take revenge. I already saw it once.

HARVEY

Wow, ya really dig this movie.

TOBY

I like it a lot, Harvey.

HARVEY

What are these nerds like? How would you describe them?

TOBY

Hmm... Nerds are smart but they look and act differently than other people. Like nerds might wear polyester button-down shirts and flood pants where their ankles and their socks are showing.

Toby spills some catsup on his polyester button-down shirt. He stands up to get a napkin, revealing his flood pants.

HARVEY

So what yer sayin' is you identify with those nerds?

TOBY

(rubbing out the catsup)
Yes, I consider myself a nerd. And this movie has uplifted me. There's this one scene where a nerd grabs the microphone during a pep rally and announces that he is a nerd and that he is proud of it and stands up for the rights of other nerds. Then, he asks the kids at the pep rally who think they are nerds to come forward ... So nearly everyone in the place does. That's the way the movie ends.

HARVEY

So the nerds won, huh?

TOBY

(smiling)
Yes.

Harvey grabs the rest of Toby's fries and opens the door to leave.

HARVEY

Wow. You got this movie an' I'm gettin' hitched. We both had a good month, huh?

TOBY

(finishing his last burger)
Right. Harvey, how long are you going to be in Delaware because I'd really like to see this movie with you?

HARVEY

I'm only goin' for a week but then I'll have a wife, so I'll have to take her along. Is it a girl flick?

TOBY

Depends on the girl. What kind of girl is your new bride? Is she a nerd?

HARVEY

I don't know, man. Maybe. She's into herbal teas.

Toby watches Harvey saunter off. He returns to his last hamburger.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - 1980'S - NIGHT

A brightly lit marquee reads, "REVENGE OF THE NERDS."

The doors to the theater open and a crowd pours onto the street.

HARVEY, JOYCE and TOBY are among them. Toby proudly wears a "Genuine Nerd" button on his striped shirt.

JOYCE

I agree with Toby. I think it's a story of hope and tolerance.

TOBY

Yes. It's about time that the people who get picked on get to be the heroes.

Harvey scrunches his face in disbelief.

HARVEY

It's an entertaining flick an' I can see why you like it Toby, but those people on the screen ain't even supposed to be you! They're college students whose parents live in big houses in the suburbs. They're gonna get degrees, get good jobs and stop being nerds.

Joyce hits Harvey.

JOYCE

Harvey, what did I say about loud talking? Use your inside voice.

HARVEY

(whispering loudly)

Look Toby, the guys in that movie are not 28-year-old file clerks who live with their grandmothers in an ethnic ghetto.

JOYCE

That's enough, Harvey.

HARVEY

They didn't get their computers like you did -- by trading in a bunch of box tops and \$49.50 at the supermarket.

Joyce folds her arms in disapproval. Toby starts to laugh.

TOBY

You're funny Harvey.

Harvey looks at him, disappointed. He shakes his head.

HARVEY

Sure, Toby. Go to the movies and daydream, but "Revenge of the Nerds" ain't reality. It's just Hollywood bullshit.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOBY'S CAR -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON TOBY'S CAR (through windshield)

Toby and Joyce continue to analyze the movie in the front seat as Toby starts the ignition.

CUT TO:

INT. TOBY'S CAR

ANGLE ON HARVEY IN BACK SEAT

Slouched, grumpy and alone on the back seat, Harvey's still annoyed by the movie.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Okay, maybe I was bein' so harsh on Toby onna count a' my own problems.

REAL HARVEY (cont'd)

Y'see, I wasn't even married a month and my old lady was already showin' signs a' trouble. Granted, I tend ta get married fast 'cause I'll take any woman that'll have me, but this time I really met my match ...

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - PRESENT - DAY

HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

A few items indicating film production are in the frame.

At a table in the foreground, BOB THE DIRECTOR discusses the character of Joyce with the ACTRESS playing her. The actress just nods as the director goes on.

We can see THE REAL JOYCE sitting with THE REAL HARVEY in the distance.

DIRECTOR

Okay, I think the thing with Joyce is that as manic as Harvey can be, she matches him with depression. In that way they complete each other. I mean, she's obviously a very smart woman, but she has a lot of trouble functioning in a world she can't control. And she's totally obsessed with all things negative; y'know, diseases, dysfunctions, etc.

THE REAL JOYCE and REAL HARVEY listen curiously -- sometimes pleased, sometimes displeased -- as their personalities are dissected and boiled down to a few phrases.

CLOSER SHOT OF REAL JOYCE AND HARVEY

The REAL JOYCE puts in her two cents about the actress playing her. She rants about what it's like to be portrayed in a movie, and having a character arc imposed on her life.

She moves into talking about her relationship with Harvey, and the first years of their marriage -- how impossible it was to live with him.

The REAL HARVEY just rolls his eyes.

END HIGH DEFINITION VIDEO DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

JOYCE is on a cleaning rampage. She rummages through piles upon piles of records while HARVEY paces nervously.

JOYCE

What about these 78's, Harvey?
Can't you sell them to one of those
collectors?

HARVEY

Are ya kidding? No way, man. I
ain't getting rid of my 78's.

Joyce throws down the records in frustration. Harvey runs over to check if they're scratched.

JOYCE

(angry)

Forget it then. I give up! How
can I make more storage space, if
you won't get rid of anything?

HARVEY

I'll get rid of stuff. Just not my
good stuff.

JOYCE

Everything's your good stuff. How
am I supposed to live here, if
there's no room for me?

HARVEY

Aw come on, baby. I'll make room
for ya. You just have to give me
time. I'm not so good at these
kind of things.

JOYCE

That's because you're obsessive
compulsive Harvey.

A DOOR BUZZER rings. Harvey slams it to unlock the front.

HARVEY

C'mon. I don't wanna hear that
psychobabble crap!

JOYCE

I don't care if you wanna hear it
or not. You're the poster child
for the DSM III. I'll have you
know that I come from a very
dysfunctional family. I can spot
personality disorders a mile
away...

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR interrupts their argument.

Joyce storms away to answer it.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR:

Joyce opens it to face a smiling TOBY -- dressed as usual in
a loud polyester fashion don't. He talks in his strange
robotic voice and avoids all eye contact.

TOBY

Hello Joyce. Is Harvey home?

Joyce turns to Harvey and points to Toby.

JOYCE

Borderline autistic!

This scene shrinks into a square up in the corner. The next
few scenes (NEUROSIS MONTAGE) further divide up the full
screen like a comic book.

INT. CLEVELAND COMIC BOOK STORE - 1980'S - DAY

R. CRUMB leaps from behind an autograph table (where he's
signing comics) to hop on the back of ZAFTIG BABE, who offers
him a piggy-back ride.

Joyce turns to Harvey.

JOYCE

Polymorphously Perverse.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

JOYCE picks up Harvey from work. HARVEY enters the car,
waving goodbye to the ranting MR. BOATS.

She points to Mr. Boats.

JOYCE
Paranoid Personality Disorder.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. A disheveled, tired-looking JOYCE flips through a novel and lets the machine pick up.

ANSWERING MACHINE
Please leave a message. (Beep)

HARVEY
(into phone)
Hey Joyce, it's me. You're not gonna believe this but some LA producer called an' he wants to do a play about my life. Call me!
(Click)

Joyce flips the page.

JOYCE
(to herself)
Delusions of grandeur.

END NEUROSIS MONTAGE (return to full screen)

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - 1980'S - EVENING

HARVEY and JOYCE sit in a packed theater watching a play. Joyce looks exhausted.

ANGLE ON STAGE

A STAGE ACTOR HARVEY and a STAGE ACTOR JOYCE share a couch on the sparse stage.

STAGE ACTOR HARVEY
See, I think comics can be an art form. With pictures an' words, a guy can do pretty much anything!

STAGE ACTOR JOYCE
That's true, Harvey. But I didn't come all the way from Delaware to talk about comics ...

The "Stage Actor Joyce" lunges over and plants a kiss on him.

ANGLE ON HARVEY AND JOYCE IN AUDIENCE

Harvey digs it but Joyce looks disgusted.

BACK TO STAGE

We now see STAGE ACTOR HARVEY clutching a tea cup, as STAGE ACTOR JOYCE kneels before a toilet bowl. Off to the side of the stage, A SPOT LIGHT illuminates a GUITAR PLAYER, who adds music to the scene.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE walk through the terminal. Harvey brims with energy but Joyce looks exhausted.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

If ya think readin' comics about yer life seems strange, try watchin' a play about it. God only knows how I'll feel when I see this movie. But truth be told, the play wasn't half bad, and we got a free trip outta it. Things were goin' pretty good for a change. VARIETY called me "The Blue Collar Mark Twain," and Doubleday was interested in publishing an anthology of "American Splendor."

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM - 1980'S - DAY

Harvey nervously taps his foot as he waits for the bags. Joyce leans against the carousel staring at a YOUNG MOTHER with a BABY in a Bjorn.

HARVEY

I hate checkin' bags, man. It always takes forever.

He checks his watch. Joyce remains quiet and distant.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Jesus, look at the time. The bus is gonna leave soon and there won't be another one for an hour.

HARVEY(cont'd)

That means I gotta shell out an
extra thirty bucks for a cab.

Harvey spots a bag that he thinks is his.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Hey wait, there's our --
(a well-dressed man grabs
it)
Figures. That lucky Yuppie's gonna
get on the bus in time.

Suddenly, Joyce mumbles something to Harvey.

JOYCE

Y'know Harvey, vasectomies are
reversible.

HARVEY

(ignoring her)
Damn Yuppies get everything.

JOYCE

(raising her voice)
Are you listening to me? I said
vasectomies are reversible.

Heads turn.

HARVEY

What? Whattya talkin' about? I
don't want kids. An' I came clean
about my vasectomy the first time I
set eyes on ya', right here in this
airport.

More heads turn.

JOYCE

I know but things have changed. I
think we can be a family.

HARVEY

Family?! What kinda family could
we possibly be? I ain't no good
with kids. I can barely take care
of myself.

JOYCE

I'll take care of the kid and you.

HARVEY

(dead serious)

No way Joyce. Forget it. I can't do it; I can't have no kids.

Joyce folds her arms... dejected, defeated. The audience of eavesdroppers looks disappointed as well.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

If the place was a disaster before, believe it or not, it's gotten worse. JOYCE seems to have given up on her organizing... and everything else for that matter.

HARVEY hysterically searches through the mess for a record album. Joyce just lies listlessly on an open futon on the middle of the room; it looks as if she hasn't been up in days.

HARVEY

Where the hell is that Ornette Coleman album, Joyce? I got a review due tomorrow.

Joyce rolls over.

JOYCE

I didn't touch it, Harvey. Would you let me sleep?

HARVEY

But it's one o'clock! How late can a person sleep?

Joyce sits up. This time she means business.

JOYCE

It happens to be Saturday you selfish sonofabitch! And don't you go telling me what to do. I'm the one who moved into your city, into your home, into your vasectomy and into your screwed-up life. The least you could do is allow me to live here my way.

She rolls over and covers her head with the pillow. Harvey just stands there staring at her.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - 1980'S - DAY

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
I tried everything but nothin'
could get this woman outta bed.

HARVEY peruses the aisles. He pulls box upon box of herbal tea off the shelves.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.) (cont'd)
I mean she wouldn't get a job,
wouldn't go out, wouldn't make
friends, nothin'.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY throws boxes of herbal teas at JOYCE as she sprawls listlessly on the futon. She just yawns and turns over on her side.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
Joyce diagnosed herself as
"clinically depressed." I don't
know what the hell she was goin'
through but it was sure takin' it's
toll on me.

A frustrated Harvey tries once more to cheer her up.

HARVEY
(upbeat)
We can go out for dinner tonight.
How 'bout catching a bite at
Tommy's?

JOYCE
(mumbling)
I'm not hungry.

Harvey throws his hands in the air and walks off.

HARVEY
I give up.

As he passes the answering machine, he notices it's blinking.

HARVEY (cont'd)
Hey Joyce, we got a message here.
Why didn't you pick up.

Joyce doesn't respond.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Useless.

He presses the play button.

ANGLE ON ANSWERING MACHINE: A loud "beep," then ...

MALE VOICE

Hi, this is a message for Harvey Pekar. My name is Jonathan Greene and I'm a producer for LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN. We'd like to talk to you about coming on the show to plug your comics. Please give me a call at 212-555-3333.

HARVEY (O.S.)

What the hell?

Joyce sits up. Harvey's finger hits the "Replay" button.

MALE VOICE

Hi, this is a message for Harvey --

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - 1980'S - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

The impressive skyline glistens in the spring sun.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Joyce finally got off the futon...

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - NEW YORK - 1980'S - DAY

Armed with shopping bags from Bleecker Bob's Record Shop, the Strand Book Store and Forbidden Planet Comic Book Emporium, HARVEY and JOYCE eat lunch on a park bench. Harvey chomps on a knish and watches oddball New Yorkers stroll by as Joyce nibbles on her hot dog.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- DAY

CLOSE UP ON AN ICE BUCKET

Cut back to reveal Harvey, schlepping an ice bucket down a hall in his underwear. A FEMALE BUSINESS TRAVELER passes and stares at him. He enters a room with a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign.

INT. NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

The PEKARS have already wreaked havoc on their luxury hotel room. It looks like a tornado touched down on the New York Hilton.

HARVEY tries on outfits for the big show. He pulls a wrinkled T-shirt over his head and models it for JOYCE who is spread out on the bed surrounded by piles of clothing, scissors and sewing supplies. She glances up at Harvey's get-up and shakes her head no.

HARVEY

Aw, c'mon. Who the hell cares?

Harvey tosses his shirt over to Joyce, who snatches it and starts cutting it with a scissor.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Hey, whattya doin?

JOYCE

Merchandising.

She resumes her mysterious sewing project; she seems to be making some kind of doll.

CUT TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

Backstage, JOYCE watches LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN on a monitor as HARVEY awaits his turn to go on camera. He has changed out of his wrinkled T-shirt into a slightly more formal look -- a denim shirt and a ratty seersucker striped jacket.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

ANGLE ON MONITOR (Note: This is actual stock footage of the show)

A 1980's DAVID LETTERMAN wisecracks.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

Neither Joyce nor Harvey look particularly impressed with the whole deal.

JOYCE
People like this show?

Harvey paces.

HARVEY
I'm gettin' hungry back here. They oughtta leave ya donuts or somethin'.

A nervous STAGE MANAGER wearing a headset peeks his head in.

STAGE MANAGER
Dave's ready for you now, Mr. Pekar.

HARVEY
Hey, you got anything ta eat? My stomach's growling.

STAGE MANAGER
(checking his watch)
There's no time to eat now.

Harvey glances at the monitor just as Letterman announces his next guest.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN
Okay. Our next guest works as a file clerk in a Cleveland hospital.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

The stage manager grabs Harvey by the arm. Joyce stops them.

JOYCE
Wait a minute. Where's the doll?

HARVEY
He's got it at the desk. Will you relax about that already?

STAGE MANAGER

Guys, guys, we're in a hurry here.

The Stage Manager physically pushes Harvey out of the Green Room. Joyce turns back to face the monitor.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

ANGLE ON MONITOR

Letterman holds up a copy of a full-size glossy AMERICAN SPLENDOR ANTHOLOGY.

LETTERMAN

... He also writes comic books which detail his day-to-day pains and pleasures, and this is an anthology of nine of those comics. It's entitled AMERICAN SPLENDOR... From off the streets of Cleveland, please say hello to Harvey Pekar.

THE HARVEY PEKAR WHO WALKS ONTO THE SET IS NOT THE ACTOR PORTRAYING HIM BUT RATHER THE REAL HARVEY PEKAR (only about 15 years younger). THIS IS ACTUAL STOCK FOOTAGE FROM HARVEY'S FIRST LETTERMAN APPEARANCE.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - DAY

Joyce watches as Harvey shakes Letterman's hand and takes a seat.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

He smiles as the audience warmly greets him. It seems Harvey's grooving on this attention. But as soon as the audience quiets down, Harvey turns to his host and starts his offensive:

HARVEY

I'm ready for those Cleveland jokes. Go ahead...

Taken off guard, Letterman laughs.

LETTERMAN

Alright settle down Harvey. Settle down.

(the Audience laughs)

Now let's explain to folks who may not be familiar with your work what it is you do here, exactly.

LETTERMAN (cont'd)

You have comic books about you in your daily life in Cleveland.

HARVEY

That's right.

LETTERMAN

And are they embellished at all or is it pretty much factual?

HARVEY

(patronizing)

No. It's all true, David. All true.

LETTERMAN

And you also have a regular job in Cleveland working at a hospital.

HARVEY

That's right. Aiding the sick, yes.

LETTERMAN

Aiding the sick. Well that's certainly noble work.

HARVEY

Thank you. Thank you.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

ANGLE on Joyce watching

JOYCE

(unimpressed)

Such brilliant repartee ...

BACK TO:

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN

Now it seems to me Harvey that you have a very successful career here. This is being published by a major publishing company, Doubleday. Why do you maintain the day job?

HARVEY

(defensive)

To make a living!

HARVEY(cont'd)

(big laughs)

I don't make a living as a writer.
I've been writing for many years,
David. Maybe more years than
you've been alive.

Now, Letterman cracks up.

BACK TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

A LETTERMAN REGULAR (Tony Randall?) comes in with some food.
He stops by the monitor to watch a moment with Joyce.

HARVEY

Yeah, I know that my youthful
appearance belies, you know, my
actual age. But, I've been around
for a long time--

LETTERMAN REGULAR

(to JOYCE)

You know this guy?

JOYCE

I'm beginning to wonder.

The Letterman Regular takes a seat as he watches the monitor.
He seems more intrigued than Joyce.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

LETTERMAN

But I have a feeling though, if you
wanted to, you could probably get
by on what you make selling your
work. Because I know people are
after you to write other things.
You're publishing this anthology...

This hits a sore spot. Harvey goes from politely
condescending to cantankerous in one second flat!

HARVEY

Who? What people? What people?
What are you talking about? Where
the hell do you get that stuff?

Letterman cracks up. The Audience laughs even harder.

HARVEY (cont'd)
 I'm no show biz phoney. I'm
 telling the truth. Come on, man.

The Audience can't believe this guy's holding his own with
 Letterman.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

ANGLE ON LETTERMAN REGULAR

LETTERMAN REGULAR
 (to Joyce)
 At least he's keeping up with
 Letterman.

JOYCE
 Pandering is more like it.

Suddenly, Joyce walks over to the monitor and looks for the
 channel. She hits a button, but it only changes the frame of
 the show.

JOYCE (cont'd)
 Damn it.

LETTERMAN REGULAR
 Excuse me, but what are you doing?

JOYCE
 I'm trying to get some news. You
 know there's a big story about to
 break about the US selling arms to
 Iran and the Contras.

LETTERMAN REGULAR
 That's a monitor.

JOYCE
 Ugh. Just forget it.

Joyce gives up. She sinks back into her seat and pulls a
 book from her bag. The Letterman Regular stares at her like
 she's from Mars.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

ANGLE ON THE MONITOR

LETTERMAN

Harvey, I know you've got a job.
I've got a job. We're both very
lucky. We both have jobs.

HARVEY

Then what's the matter?

Once again laughs and a big round of applause. Letterman
pulls out Joyce's mysterious doll and props it up on the
table.

LETTERMAN

We've gotta go. Harvey I like you.
I'm on your side. I enjoy the
comic books. And here, quickly
tell us about the little doll here.

HARVEY

My wife made it.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

BACK TO JOYCE.

She suddenly perks up.

JOYCE

Finally something good.
(to Letterman Regular)
Watch this.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

CLOSE-UP OF THE DOLL

It is an absolutely horrific but oddly evocative "Harvey Rag
Doll." His face is inspired by Crumb's drawings of Harvey
but even more extreme. His little T-shirt reads, "American
Splendor."

The Audience is in stitches.

LETTERMAN

They're made out of your old
clothing.

HARVEY

That's right.

LETTERMAN

And what do these go for?

HARVEY
Thirty-four bucks.

LETTERMAN
(shocked)
Thirty-four dollars? Thirty-four
dollars for this?

HARVEY
What are ya cheap. You cheaper
than me?

LETTERMAN
Would you pay thirty-four dollars
for that?

HARVEY
No but I'm not asking it. My wife
is.

BACK TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

JOYCE stares at the monitor, expressionless. The STAGE
MANAGER sticks his head in.

STAGE MANAGER
He's a natural.

LETTERMAN REGULAR
He is. Good stuff.

The Stage Manager grabs the Regular.

STAGE MANAGER
C'mon. Your turn.

A smiling HARVEY (the actor now) waltzes in straight from his
command performance.

HARVEY
Whad'ya think?

Joyce taps her finger on Letterman's image on the monitor.

JOYCE
Megalomaniac.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY tries on a ripped T-shirt for Joyce who lies on the bed.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

It became clear pretty fast that I was invited on the show just for laughs. But what the hell did I care? Letterman was an okay guy. Let him take pot shots at me, s'long as I got paid an' got to plug my comics.

CUT TO:

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

MONTAGE: A series of actual HARVEY appearances on LATE NIGHT WITH LETTERMAN.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

JOYCE, whose different outfits reflect time passage, watches each time from the GREEN ROOM.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE

HARVEY, in a ratty T-shirt, spars with LETTERMAN.

LETTERMAN

Harvey, you are the embodiment of the American dream ...

The Audience laughs.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Funny thing is, somethin' about me and Letterman clicked for the viewers. He kept wantin' me back.

LETTERMAN SHOW - STOCK FOOTAGE - ANOTHER SHOW

LETTERMAN introduces his favorite guest.

LETTERMAN

It is my pleasure to welcome back our next guest, the lovable Harvey Pekar!

HARVEY walks out with a box of donuts. He starts giving Letterman an earful right off the bat.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here was this slick, ambitious guy with millions, winnin' over the country by makin' light of everything. And then there was me... A messy loser with no dough who takes everything too seriously.

LETTERMAN

Tell me Harvey, what do you do to get away from the pressure of being -- well, a file clerk? (laughter)

HARVEY

Go ahead and laugh, folks. But he has more contempt for you than I do!

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE CASTLE - 1980'S - DAY

The burger joint has been transformed into a film set with lights, cameras and lots of trendy MTV types.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

An it wasn't just me gettin' all the attention. As a result of my appearances on Letterman, my buddy Toby Radloff landed a gig on MTV extolling the virtues of White Castle burgers...

OFF TO THE SIDE:

Two HOT BABES slave over TOBY as he gets his hair and make-up done.

HARVEY wanders onto the set. He finally spots Toby in the corner. As he heads over to say hello, Harvey bumps into the MTV DIRECTOR -- a new wave fashion victim who looks like a lost member of A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS.

MTV DIRECTOR

Christ! Watch where you're going!

HARVEY

(muttering)

Fuckin' yuppie or whatever kinda
freak you are.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

That day on the set with those MTV
jerks, I had an epiphany. It
seemed that real, salt of the earth
people like Toby an' me were bein'
coopted by these huge corporations.
We were gettin' held up and
ridiculed as losers in the system.
What can I say, it was the 80's
man.

CUT TO:

MTV PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

TOBY, dressed in dark sunglasses and a turtleneck, stands in
front of a White Castle. He delivers his lines in his
trademark robotic style. There's an MTV logo on the bottom
of the screen.

TOBY

Hamburgers are a safer addiction
than drugs. Say no to drugs. Say
yes to White Castle!

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND DINER - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE eat breakfast together. Harvey reads a
Katherine Mansfield book as JOYCE reads a newspaper.

JOYCE

(looking up from the
paper)

Harvey, I've been reading about
these kids who grew up in war zones
-- Palestinians, Israelis, El
Salvadorians, Cambodians... These
kids are amazing and they're --

A YUPPIE in a jogging suit walks up to Harvey, interrupting
Joyce in mid-sentence.

YUPPIE
Hey, you're that guy from the
Letterman show, right?

HARVEY
(smiling)
Yeah, that's me.

YUPPIE
That's so excellent. You and
Stupid Pet Tricks are a riot.

Harvey's not smiling anymore. This guy's a jerk.

HARVEY
Yeah? Then why dontcha buy one of
my comics, man. That's the only
reason I go on that dumb show
anyway.

YUPPIE
Right, sure. Later, Harvey Pekar!

The Yuppie rushes out.

HARVEY
Asshole.

JOYCE
Anyway, I want to do a political
comic book about these kids.
There's a conference in Jerusalem
in a few weeks, and I can start by
doing interviews there.

HARVEY
Whoa whoa, wait a second.
Jerusalem? I can barely drag you
off the futon to go to the
Letterman show.

JOYCE
Y'know why? 'Cause I don't give a
damn about the Letterman show. I
want to work on something important
to me. Something that matters.

Joyce hits a nerve.

HARVEY
(furious)
Hey! You know I only go on the
show for the extra bread!

People start to look over.

JOYCE
Harvey ... you're yelling ...

HARVEY
Maybe if you got yer lazy ass up
and got a job, I could work on
something that matters, too, huh?!

Joyce doesn't dignify Harvey with an answer. She stares at him, her eyes well with hurt.

He sighs, calming down. He looks around sheepishly.

HARVEY (cont'd)
I'm sorry, baby. I -- I'm sorry
...

He grabs her hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE stroll across the lawn holding hands. They move towards a waiting CAB. Harvey carries his wife's bags.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
I guess it was good ta finally see
Joyce excited about somethin' of
her own. Sure I was happy for her.
But I was still upset for me.

They stop by the cab.

HARVEY
This is crazy. Can't ya just do
somethin' here in Cleveland?

JOYCE
Harvey, you'll survive a few weeks
alone.

HARVEY
Alright...Be careful. I love you,
baby.

They kiss. Harvey grudgingly puts her bags in the car. He watches as the cab pulls away.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
It was later that night when I
first found the lump.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

Wearing only his shorts, Harvey lies alone in the communal futon, flipping through a book. He reaches into his underwear to scratch his nuts.

Suddenly he stops. He feels something odd ...

For a moment he just freezes. His eyes register panic.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
I was determined to put it outta my
mind until Joyce got back. Easier
said than done.

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - 1980'S - DAY

An enraged HARVEY fights with his co-worker MIGUEL.

HARVEY
What do I care! Just gimme the
chart already!

MIGUEL
What is your problem today?!

HARVEY
Look, Miguel! I just don't wanna
keep comin' back here for it,
okay?!

MIGUEL
Harvey, that patient's due t'be
admitted a week from now! Why do
you always have to be picking
fights with everybody?

HARVEY
(yelling)
How many times do we gotta go
through the same bullshit. Just
gimme the fuckin' chart!

Offended, Miguel storms off.

MIGUEL

We'll see what the doctor says
about this.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

Alone and slumped over his table, HARVEY draws comic ideas with stick figures. Nothing's coming to him. He looks like he's in anguish.

Frustrated, Harvey crumbles the idea and throws it on the floor. He knocks over a chair.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

He tosses and turns in bed. No way he's sleeping.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY is yelling into the telephone. It is a bad connection.

HARVEY

(loudly into phone)

Whadya mean? Another two weeks?
Ya gotta come home some time!
Hello? DAMNIT!

CUT TO:

INT. BACK STAGE - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

Without Joyce, a surly HARVEY waits in the wings for his introduction. He sneaks a peek as Letterman finishes up the "Stupid Pet Tricks" segment. We hear dogs barking and audience laughter.

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

And there you have it, folks!
Another enlightening episode of
Stupid Pet Tricks!

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

I was startin' ta lose it. Between the lump, the loneliness -- I felt like everything wuz closin' in on me. And with Joyce over there savin' the world, I never felt more like a sell-out hack in my life.

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

Y'know ladies and gentlemen, when Thoreau wrote that most men lead lives of quiet depression, he obviously had not met our first guest, who happens to lead a life of whining desperation ...

Harvey clenches his fists.

HARVEY

(threatening)

Okay, asshole. You'll pay for that one...

Harvey takes off his shirt. He pulls another t-shirt out of the bag and changes ...

LETTERMAN REGULAR (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome back, Harvey Pekar.

Harvey's new t-shirt reads "ON STRIKE AGAINST NBC." He takes off for the stage, fists clenched, a soldier marching off to war.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - NBC STUDIOS - 1980'S - DAY

We're positioned behind the monitor, so we can only hear the show. THE STAGE MANAGER AND TWO PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS straighten up in the room.

HARVEY (O.S.)

Hey, Dave! You wanna know what my politics are? I'm a strident leftist, Dave.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

I could have guessed half of that.

HARVEY (O.S.)

You coulda guessed all of it, man!
So why don't we talk about your
parent company, G.E., huh? Let's
talk about anti-trust violations
and nuclear reactors!

STAGE MANAGER

Joe, put more sodas in the fridge,
there. And let's clean up the
counters. That Pekar guy's a pig.

As the P.A.'s walk back and forth in front of the monitor, we
hear the Letterman / Pekar banter grow louder.

Suddenly PRODUCTION ASSISTANT #2 stops and checks out the
monitor.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT #2

Whoa ... you guys. Check this out.

INT. TOBY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

TOBY and his GRANDMOTHER watch HARVEY raise hell on
Letterman. Again, we can't see the screen.

HARVEY (O.S.)

You're a cop-out, Letterman.
You're nothin' but a shill for G.E.

Toby's GRANDMOTHER passes him a plate of cookies.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)

First of all, Harvey, what you are
saying is not true. Second of all,
this is not the place to say it.
If you want to talk about this, go
somewhere else, because you're not
talking about it here!!

CUT TO:

INT. MR. BOAT'S KITCHEN - 1980'S - DAY

Dressed in a bathrobe, Mr. Boats eats a lonely, late-night
snack (cake and milk) at his kitchen table. A 12" TV on the
table has Harvey and Dave on.

HARVEY (O.S.)

Don't worry, Dave. I won't come
back unless you beg me.

LETTERMAN (O.S.)
You're not coming back at all.

HARVEY (O.S.)
What do I care--

LETTERMAN (O.S.)
Because we've given you many, many
chances to talk about things that
would be of general interest to
people--

HARVEY (O.S.)
So what?!

Mr. Boats shakes his head.

INT. TOWN CAR - 1980'S - DAY

We see Harvey alone, slumped in the back seat of a Town Car, heading back towards his hotel. City lights pass over his troubled face. We still hear the show, as if it's now in his head.

LETTERMAN (V.O.)
--And also to promote your little
Mickey Mouse magazine. Your little
weekly reader! But you've blown
every chance you've got. You're a
dork, Harvey!

HARVEY (V.O.)
Dave, you're fulla shit! You're
fulla shit!!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

CLOSE ON AN AMERICAN SPLENDOR COMIC

The cover depicts a snarling LETTERMAN yelling, "YOU FUCKED UP A GREAT THING!" at a smirking, self-satisfied HARVEY.

JOYCE lies in bed reading the comic, chuckling. HARVEY cuddles up against her.

JOYCE
I guess you did it this time.

HARVEY

Who cares. He wasn't helpin' my sales anyway.

(moving closer)

Baby, don't go away anymore. I just can't take bein' alone.

Joyce puts the magazine down.

JOYCE

If you met those kids over there and saw what they go through, you wouldn't ask that of me.

HARVEY

But if you go again I'm really gonna lose it.

JOYCE

It's not open for discussion, Harvey. I need this in my life right now.

She cuddles up close to him.

JOYCE (cont'd)

But I do appreciate the fact that you missed me so much. C'mere ...

She starts to kiss him. He kisses her back. Her hands wander down. Suddenly she feels something strange.

JOYCE (cont'd)

Harvey, what is that?

Harvey looks at her and gulps.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE sit in the office holding hands, like two terrified high school kids. A DOCTOR stands before them. They just got bad news ...

JOYCE

I don't understand, does "tumor" mean the same thing as "cancer"?

The doctor gently nods.

Joyce covers her mouth. Harvey holds onto his head. He looks positively dizzy.

The doctor starts to talk, yet the words don't seem to match his mouth. He looks dubbed. Strange phrases just weave together, echo and bounce off the wall, making no sense at all.

... we know the growth is malignant. What we don't know is how far it may have spread. Once we have the results of the biopsy, we can make more informed decisions about treatment ... blah, blah, blah ...

The whole office seems to spin.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - LATER

Joyce and Harvey sit on the stoop of their apartment house, in a daze. The words keep echoing around them. Harvey holds his head.

DOCTOR #2

*... cat scan ... diagnosis ... MRI
... cancer ... cancer ... cancer
...*

HARVEY

How can I have cancer? I don't feel sick at all.

JOYCE

That's a positive thing.

HARVEY

My cousin Norman died of lymphoma. He was twenty-nine. He was a brilliant oncologist.

JOYCE

Stop it! You're not going to die, Harvey. You're not.

Harvey turns to Joyce.

HARVEY

What's going to happen to you, baby? Who's gonna take care of you if I'm not around?

Joyce stands up, determined.

JOYCE

Harvey, look at me and focus. We are going to get through this. I understand illness. I know how to handle these things.

HARVEY

But that's you. I'm not strong enough. I don't know how to be positive. I can't do it. I can't.

JOYCE

Yes, you can. And I'll tell you how. You'll make a comic book out of the whole thing. You'll document every little detail. And that way you'll remove yourself from the experience until it's over.

Despite Joyce's passionate pitch, Harvey shakes his head.

HARVEY

I can't do that. I'm just not strong enough... I just wanna die.

Joyce folds her arm.

JOYCE

Fine. I'll do it without you.

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and JOYCE lay there quietly, both exhausted. Joyce turns over so her back faces Harvey. He puts his arm around her.

ANGLE ON JOYCE'S FACE

A tear drips down her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce is straightening up the apartment. The place actually looks halfway decent.

THE DOORBELL RINGS

Joyce opens the door. A guy in his 30's named FRED -- Hells Angels tough guy meets sensitive artist -- stands at the door. He's accompanied by a seven-year-old girl, DANIELLE.

FRED
Hey, I'm Fred. You called me about
the comic book?

JOYCE
Right -- the artist. Come on in.

FRED
This is my daughter, Danielle. I
had to bring her along. I hope you
don't mind.

Joyce leans down and addresses the girl, who holds a toy horse.

JOYCE
Hi, Danielle. What's that you're
holding?

DANIELLE
A pony.

It's immediately obvious that Joyce is great with kids.

JOYCE
A pony? What's his name?

DANIELLE
She's a girl. Clarissa.

JOYCE
Oh, I see. Well, I'm Joyce. Nice
to meet both you and Clarissa.

They all walk towards the table which is covered with papers.

FRED
I'm really sorry to hear about
Harvey. Is he here?

JOYCE
He's going to work until next week,
when he starts the chemo. That's
why I wanna get this project
started now. Once he's stuck here,
I know he'll take over.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - LATER

Miserable and in a daze, HARVEY walks up to his front door. He looks like a man whose days are numbered. When he reaches the door, he searches his pockets for keys.

ANGLE ON POCKET

Harvey's hand comes up empty.

HARVEY

Shit!

Harvey tries the doorknob, but it's locked.

He steps back on the lawn and looks around. Could he have dropped them? He retraces a few steps.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Damnit!

Harvey yells up at the window.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Joyce, open the door! I lost my keys again! Joyce!!

ANGLE ON FRONT DOOR

HARVEY'S ELDERLY NEIGHBOR struggles with her shopping cart through the door.

Harvey pushes past her to get in.

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT VESTIBULE

Harvey knocks again. Nothing. Now he punches the door.

HARVEY

Joyce!! Open the fucking door!!

Suddenly the door opens. Loud music pours out. But it's not Joyce, it's FRED, the artist.

FRED

Hey, Harvey.

HARVEY

Fred?

Harvey just stares at him. Fred opens the door to reveal:

JOYCE and DANIELLE dancing together with the stereo blasting. They're having a ball.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

At the kitchen table, HARVEY looks over FRED'S sketches. JOYCE and DANIELLE are now building a house of cards on the living room floor.

FRED

Here are some ideas we batted around.

HARVEY

Sheesh. Joyce doesn't know what she's doing. There's too many words in these frames. When are ya comin' back?

FRED

Uh, she said something about next Tuesday, which is fine with me. Only thing is, I might have the kid again. My ex-wife's supposed to take her, but I don't have much faith in her showing up. She is in worse shape than me these days.

Harvey looks away at Joyce and Danielle playing. They're oblivious to the world.

HARVEY

Next week my treatment begins. Do me a favor. Bring the kid with you.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: A PENCIL SKETCHING

FRED'S PENCIL completes a sketch of Joyce pushing Harvey in a wheelchair. The word "cancer" appears everywhere, floating all around the image.

COMIC ART / REAL LIFE MONTAGE

The following montage chronicles Harvey's illness by cutting between comic art depicting key events and shots of HARVEY, JOYCE and FRED creating the book.

The montage is set to the simultaneously dulcet and discordant tone of Miles Davis' "Blue in Green" (or something similar).

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - 1980'S - DAY

Close on Harvey's face as he's getting pushed down the hall in a wheelchair.

CUT TO:

M.R.I. COMIC PANEL

A panel of Harvey entering the M.R.I. machine.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

We see Harvey, Joyce and Fred sitting around a table. Joyce fights to keep Harvey focused on the project.

BACK TO MORE COMIC PANELS:

- 1) An enraged Harvey throws things around the house.
- 2) Joyce on the bed crying, a cat licking her back.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S SHOWER - 1980'S - DAY

A balding Harvey depressed in the shower. He holds a clump of hair in his hand.

CUT TO:

COMIC PANEL OF THE ABOVE SCENE

Harvey in the shower. The balloon above his head reveals his inner turmoil over losing his hair and his face swelling.

MORE COMIC PANELS FOLLOW

Harvey in agony. Various positions of him in bed, on all fours, covered with a case of shingles. "I feel like I'm on fire" appears over his head.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S KITCHEN - 1980'S - DAY

Joyce and Fred go over some more comic art. Joyce carries the idea over to Harvey (wearing a baseball cap), who can't get out of the couch. He looks it over and nods. Danielle brings Harvey a glass of water.

CUT TO:

MORE COMIC PANELS:

Harvey crawling up the steps. "I'm so weak I can't make it," he thinks ...

Harvey and Joyce in a hospital waiting room. He's slumped over, she has her hand on him.

A delirious Harvey surrounded by nurses and Joyce. "She's torturing me, she won't let me die, I wanna die ..."

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BATHROOM - 1980'S - DAY

A balding Harvey lies on his bathroom floor. His cat walks all over him.

HARVEY

I wanna die ... just let me die ...

CUT TO:

MORE COMIC PANELS:

Joyce attempts to wake Harvey up. She curses at him. She slaps him. "Why are you doing this to me!"

A drawing of Joyce, doubled over, crying. "I can't talk this anymore ..."

THE MONTAGE ENDS WITH A SCENE IN HARVEY'S BEDROOM

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - NIGHT

A repeat of the opening scene ... Like a ghost, a naked HARVEY stands over his bed staring down at a sleeping JOYCE. In the eerie light, he's almost translucent.

HARVEY
(faintly)
Joyce ... Joyce?

Joyce springs up, alarmed.

JOYCE
What's wrong, Harvey? What are you
doing up?

Harvey just stands there for a moment saying nothing.

JOYCE (cont'd)
What is it?

HARVEY
(delirious, out of breath)
Tell me the truth. Am I some guy
who writes about himself in a comic
book? Or am I just --just a
character in that book?

JOYCE
Harvey ...

HARVEY
When I die, will 'dat character
keep goin'? Or will he just fade
away.

Joyce just stares at him, unsure how to answer. Finally Harvey collapses.

Joyce leaps from the bed, nervous, hysterical. She gets down on the floor and shakes him.

JOYCE
Omigod, Harvey! Harvey, wake up!

CLOSE ON HARVEY'S FACE

His eyes remain closed, his expression far, far away. The sound of Joyce's voice fades until it seems like a distant echo.

Then PANELS from Harvey's comics begin to float over his head, his life literally passing before his eyes in comic book form.

Slowly, the comic images and the unconscious Harvey evaporate, giving way to:

GREEN SCREEN

A SURREAL DREAM SEQUENCE

We are now in a large, empty room similar to a blank comic book panel.

A healthy, fully dressed Harvey appears in the corner of the frame. He is very far away, barely recognizable. We slowly dolly towards him as he delivers a formal soliloquy to the camera:

HARVEY

My name is Harvey Pekar. It's an unusual name -- Harvey Pekar...

As Harvey speaks, one-dimensional comic book images from his life pass over the screen once again. This time in front of him, behind him, everywhere. We dolly in towards him.

HARVEY (cont'd)

1960 was the year I got my first apartment and my first telephone book. Imagine my surprise when I looked up my name and saw that, in addition to me, another Harvey Pekar was listed!

Images of Harvey's childhood float by, followed by his young adult years.

HARVEY (cont'd)

I was listed as Harvey L. Pekar... My middle name is Lawrence... He was listed as Harvey Pekar -- no middle initial... Therefore, his was a purer listing.

We see Harvey age in the images: he's hanging on the street corner with friends, collecting records, hanging with Crumb.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Then, in the seventies, I noticed that a third Harvey Pekar was listed in the phone book! This filled me with curiosity.

HARVEY(cont'd)

How could there be three people
with such an unusual name in the
world, let alone in one city?!

Now, numerous images of Harvey's many years at the V.A.
Hospital float by: Harvey filing, Harvey arguing with his
boss, Harvey and Toby, etc.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Then one day, a person I worked
with expressed her sympathy to me
concerning what she thought was the
death of my father. She pointed
out an obituary notice in the
newspaper for a man named Harvey
Pekar. One of his sons was named
Harvey. These were the other
Harvey Pekars.

The comic images fade out. Harvey is once again alone in the
empty room.

HARVEY (cont'd)

Six months later, Harvey Pekar Jr.
died. Although I'd met neither
man, I was filled with sadness.
"What were they like," I thought.
It seemed that our lives had been
linked in some indefinable way.

We slowly move in on his face. Extremely close. As close as
the camera can get.

HARVEY (cont'd)

But the story does not end there.
For two years later another Harvey
Pekar appeared in the directory.
What kind of people are these?
Where do they come from, what do
they do? What's in a name?

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. HARVEY'S BEDROOM - 1980'S - DAY

BACK TO BEDROOM:

We are close on HARVEY'S face as he lays passed out and
delirious on the floor. Over this WE HEAR...

HARVEY

Who is Harvey Pekar?

His face slowly fades to black.

A MOMENT OF BLACK, AND THEN ...

INT. TOWER BOOKS - 1980'S - DAY

FADE IN:

CLOSE UP: A GLOSSY, FULL-COLOR, NOVEL-SIZED COMIC COVER.

Scrawled across the top in yellow and red it read, "Our Cancer Year." The drawing depicts Harvey doubled over on the front lawn, groceries in the snow, with Joyce attempting to help him up.

A hand flips the book open and signs the inside leaf.

JOYCE and a healthy-looking HARVEY sit at a table signing copies of their opus. About fifteen or so people mill about with copies.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Here's our man a year later. Somehow I made it through the treatments, an' the doctors are optimistic. I guess Joyce was right about doin' the big comic book. We published the thing as a graphic novel -- our first collaboration -- and ended up with rave reviews. We even won the American Book Award. Go figure ...

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - 1980'S - DAY

The place is still a mess but somehow it has a better vibe than it had before. This might be due to the presence of DANIELLE. She sits crossed legged on the floor making jewelry out of beads. JOYCE guides her.

HARVEY shuffles into the room. He watches for a moment as Joyce and Danielle play.

ANGLE ON JOYCE: There is an awkward expression almost resembling a smile on her face. He interrupts them.

HARVEY

Hey Joyce.

Joyce looks up. Harvey looks like he's trying to hide something.

JOYCE
What is it Harvey?

HARVEY
That was the doctor.

Joyce stops what she's doing and gulps. She hangs on Harvey's every word.

HARVEY (cont'd)
He said I'm all clear.

Tears well in Harvey's eyes. Joyce breathes a sigh of relief and Danielle jumps up and runs over to Harvey. She hugs him.

CUT TO:

INT. CLEVELAND ICE RINK - 1980 - DAY

HARVEY sits in the bleachers, watching JOYCE teach DANIELLE to ice skate.

Harvey's got a box of pizza next to him. He picks up a slice and chomps on it. The cheese drips out of his mouth onto his shirt.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)
The weirdest thing that came outta my illness was Danielle. With her real mother runnin' around who knows where, an' seein' how well her and Joyce got on, Fred decided she'd have a better life with us. I was scared at first but then I thought, what the hell. She's a good kid. So we ended up takin' her an' raising her as our own.

CUT TO:

INT. HARVEY'S APARTMENT - 1980'S - DAY

HARVEY and DANIELLE lie on the futon together. Harvey's comics are strewn around the room everywhere. Danielle flips through one.

HARVEY
Ya keep readin' 'em backward.

DANIELLE
 I like reading them backward.
 (holding up a comic)
 Is that you?

HARVEY
 I keep tellin' ya, all of 'ems me,
 man.

DANIELLE
 You look like a monster.

HARVEY
 Yeah, well wait'll ya see what
 you're gonna look like.

DANIELLE
 Me??

HARVEY
 Sure. Yer part of the story too,
 now.

DANIELLE
 What story?

HARVEY
 The story of my life.

Danielle makes a face.

HARVEY (cont'd)
 Yeah, I know I'm not as interesting
 as The Little Mermaid and all that
 magical crap...

DANIELLE
 Maybe I want to write my own comic.

HARVEY
 Oh yeah? What about?

DANIELLE
 I don't know yet. But not about
 you. You have enough already.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL BUS STOP - FALL - PRESENT - DAY

HARVEY walks towards the bus stop to send DANIELLE to school.
 He holds her hand.

HARVEY

Ya know, you should write about things in your own life. Like school and...ponies ... I don't know, girl stuff...

DANIELLE

(to Harvey)

Do you have to hold my hand?

HARVEY

(wounded)

What, are you embarrassed a' me? I know, I'm embarrassing. I felt the same way about my father.

Danielle looks up at Harvey like he's crazy.

DANIELLE

No Harvey. You're just squeezing it too hard.

(shaking her head)

Joyce is right. You are obsessive-compulsive.

Danielle drops his hand and rushes onto the bus with other kids.

Harvey waves and watches as it pulls away.

He turns and walks by himself down the busy Cleveland street - a familiar image from the opening. He's still hunched over. He's still Harvey.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

Yeah, so I guess comics brought me a lot. But don't think this is some sunny, happy ending. Every day is still a major struggle. Joyce an' I fight like crazy, an' she barely works. The kid's got A.D.D. and is a real handful. My expenses have gone up so much that I'm writin' freelance 'round the clock, just to make my bills. My life is total chaos.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - FALL - PRESENT - DAY

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE -- SHOT ON FILM

NOW THE REAL HARVEY walks down the same busy Cleveland street towards his job.

REAL HARVEY (V.O.)

With a little luck, I'll get a window of good health between retirin' an dyin'. The golden years, right? Who knows. Between my pension and the chunk of change I got for this movie, I should be able to swing somethin'. Sure I'll lose the war eventually, but the goal is to win a few skirmishes along the way. Right?

CUT TO:

INT. V.A. HOSPITAL - PRESENT - DAY

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE -- SHOT ON FILM

THE REAL HARVEY slumps at the desk now, flipping through a comic book.

ANGLE ON DOOR

THE REAL TOBY comes into the file room, carrying a cake with sparklers. He's followed by a group of Harvey's REAL CO-WORKERS and JOYCE and REAL DANIELLE.

Harvey moves the comic off his desk so Toby can put the cake down.

ANGLE ON CAKE

The festive cake reads "HAPPY RETIREMENT HARVEY."

REAL JOYCE cuts the cake and passes slices to the group. ANOTHER WORKER pops a bottle of champagne.

CLOSE on a glass of champagne getting filled. The glass sits next to the comic Harvey was reading.

CLOSE UP ON COMIC BOOK COVER

HARVEY'S new edition of AMERICAN SPLENDOR is subtitled, "OUR MOVIE YEAR." It features an illustration of HARVEY, JOYCE and DANIELLE surrounded by cameras, lights and crew.

FADE OUT: